The New Criterion

June 1993

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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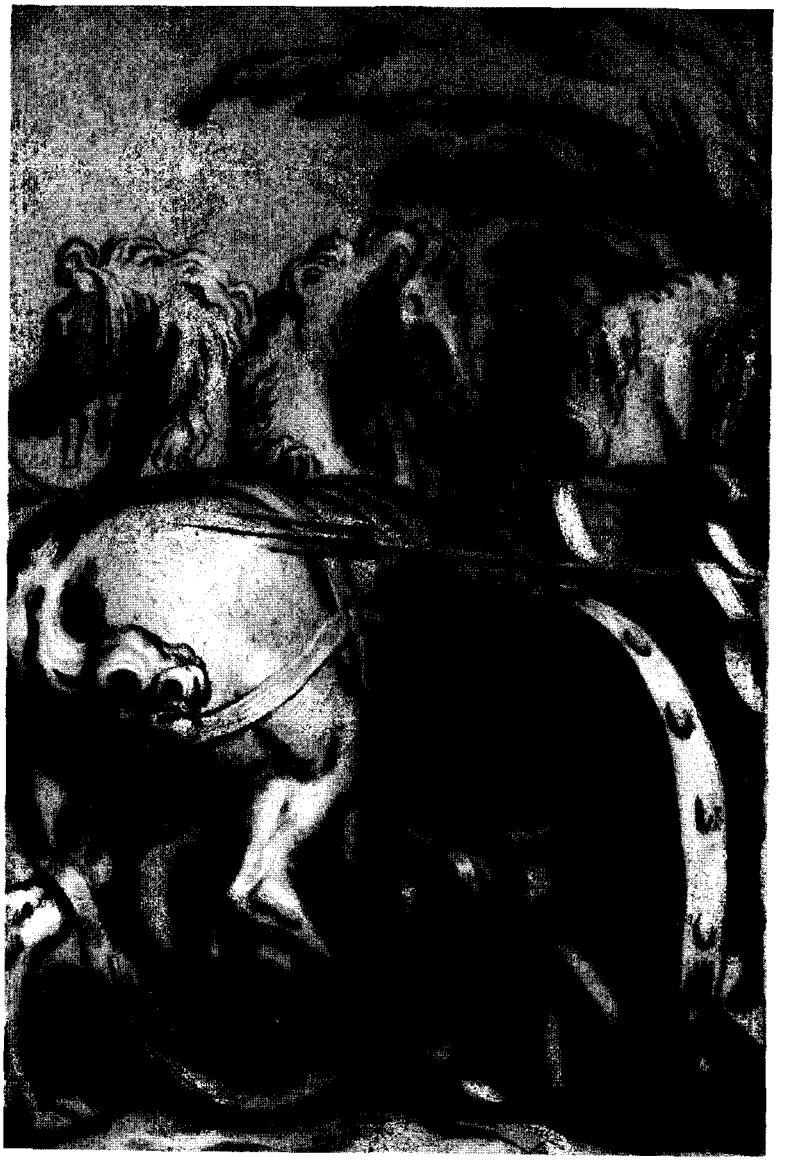

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The New Criterion *June 1993*

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Guy Davenport's new book of stories, *A Table of Green Fields*, will be published in October by New Directions.

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Samuel Lipman's latest book, *Music & More: Essays 1975-1991*, was published last year by Northwestern University Press.

Donald Lyons is the regular theater critic for *The New Criterion*.

Eugenio Montale (1896-1981), the Italian poet, critic, and translator, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1975. The poems in this issue are taken from his first collection, *Ossi di seppia*, published in 1925. *Cuttlefish Bones*, a translation of this book by the late **William Arrowsmith**, will be brought out in August by W. W. Norton.

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Notes & Comments: June 1993

Is art free expression?

Anyone with a taste for irony and a strong stomach has to regard the contemporary art world as a bonanza. Successful artists and writers in this country today are better paid and enjoy greater celebrity than ever before. They also enjoy unprecedented artistic freedom: It is difficult to imagine anything that cannot be said, shown, or performed as long as it calls itself art. And yet artists everywhere complain about the lack of "funding" for art and bemoan the threat of "censorship." The latest orgy of complaint took place recently at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. There, on May 5, some three hundred members of what a press release called "New York's cultural leadership" gathered to "show support" for free speech and to honor sixteen individuals who have made "unusual contributions to upholding the principle of freedom of expression."

Among the honorees was the performance artist Karen Finley. Miss Finley, you will remember, made a name for herself a few years ago by prancing about a stage naked and smearing herself with chocolate while simulating defecation and whining about the evils of patriarchal society. Marvelous stuff, that. Her "unusual contribution" to freedom of expression was to have had an approved grant from the National Endowment for the Arts withdrawn at the last minute by the then-director, John Frohnmayer. What an injustice!

It is hardly surprising that an occasion honoring Miss Finley and other such crusaders for the First Amendment should have attracted a glittering array of foundation support. No fewer than five foundations, including the Rockefeller Foundation and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, sponsored this celebration of free speech. But there were no cash prizes, only the warm glow of self-congratulation, and this was spread around thick as London fog.

All in all, it was an extraordinary performance, more entertaining, certainly, than much "cutting edge" theater. Agnes Gund, the figurehead president of the museum, opened the festivities by declaring that "one assumes that art *is* freedom of expression." Does one really? Then why should the Museum of Modern Art go to such pains to protect and exhibit its many treasures? Why not purge the galleries of all those paintings, sculptures, and other objects in order to set up soap boxes for the discontented and provide chocolate for Miss Finley? Miss Gund did not pause to consider such questions. And clearly no one felt that the identification of art with freedom of expression required any explanation or defense. Freedom of expression is a good thing; art is a good thing; therefore they must be the same thing.

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There is of course a certain hilarity in the exhibition of such obtuse piety. Yet behind it all is the grim, unrelenting humorlessness of political correctness. This was evident in the remarks made by George C. Wolfe, director of *Angels in America*, Broadway's latest hit play about AIDS and the supposed horrors of life under Ronald Reagan. In addition to this directing credit, Mr. Wolfe recently succeeded JoAnne Akalaitis as the head of the New York Shakespeare Festival, an institution that the late Joseph Papp (a posthumous honoree that afternoon) made world-famous. As such, Mr. Wolfe has emerged as one of the most powerful figures in the New York theater world. Nevertheless, he lectured ominously about the importance of giving hitherto "marginal" voices "center stage," warning that "the survival of the country" depended on it.

"Survival," in fact, was his word for the day. In a seamless mixture of political cliché and guilt-dispensing self-righteousness, Mr. Wolfe demanded the formation of "coalitions of survival"—whatever they may be—in order to "negotiate survival"—whatever that may mean. One thing only was beyond doubt: that Mr. Wolfe is a sensitive fellow, more sensitive than we or thee could ever be about AIDS, artists, free speech, and many other subjects. The performance artist Laurie Anderson and the choreographer Bill T. Jones also delivered cloying, politically correct homilies to the assembled multitudes. But in many ways the *pièce de résistance* was given by Anthony Lewis, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for *The New York Times*.

Like the newspaper he writes for, Mr. Lewis was full of fresh, independent-minded opinions. He likes what Oliver Wendell Holmes said about free speech. He doesn't care for Senator Joseph McCarthy. On balance, he thinks it a good thing that neo-Nazis are allowed to march peacefully through Skokie, Illinois. Accordingly, he thinks that the demand for political correctness is a threat to free speech. But what really exercised Mr. Lewis was a novel form of government censorship. You might have thought that censorship involved actually suppressing something: banning books, closing exhibitions, fining or imprisioning those responsibile for the dissemination of proscribed material. But for Mr. Lewis, that's only half the story.

He came bearing the brilliant news that the refusal of funds, too, was a form of censorship. This is good news for artists. If you, the artist, apply to the government for money and are turned down, there's a good chance that you've been censored. You wanted the NEA to pay you to make a "statement" by burning the flag in public, or covering yourself with chocolate, or immersing a crucifix in urine. They said forget it. Your First Amendment rights may have been infringed!

Even now, law suits are being filed over this issue. Mary Dorman, co-counsel for Karen Finley and other "artists" turned down by the NEA, rose during the question period to issue a "call to arms" on behalf of the multitudes who are suppressed by being denied the taxpayers' money. "We want freedom of expression and we want it without qualification," she said. Noting that President Clinton had yet to appoint a new director for the NEA, Miss Dorman urged everyone in the audience to write to their political representatives to protest the unfair treatment of artists. One might have thought that the Museum of Modern Art would have kept aloof from such lobbying. But, in response to Miss Dorman's plea, Agnes Gund was quick to assure the audience that the Museum had already dispatched letters to lawmakers. She also asked Miss Dorman to advise the audience on whom they should write to. The answer: President Clinton, Attoney General Janet Reno, congressmen, senators, et al.

Then came a delicious moment. A set designer named Ming Cho Lee got up and explained that he had written to *The New York Times* to complain about an article by the *Times*'s theater critic, Frank Rich. Mr. Rich's article, he felt, unfairly criticized

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JoAnne Akalaitis and may have precipitated her dismissal as head of the New York Shakespeare Festival. Mr. Lee had some difficulty getting a response from the *Times*. But he finally got through to an editor who told him that his letter could only be printed if everything critical of Mr. Rich himself was deleted. This, Mr. Lee insisted, denied him free speech. This was censorship! Curiously, Mr. Lewis was silent. Perhaps like us he was savoring the irony that what began as an indictment of the U.S. government should have concluded with a blast against what used to be called our paper of record.

Hegemony unmasked

James W. Tuttleton writes: It is now official. We have it on the authority of the Modern Language Association, the largest organization of professors of language and literature in the U.S., that there is no longer a discipline, a profession, a vocation of literary studies—at least not in the university. Literary study nowadays, it is said, presents a condition of "methodological instability, even anarchy," in which even the concept of literature has been abandoned as defunct. No longer, we are told, can the field "be comprehended within a single, cohesive frame." The New Orthodoxy is that there isn't one.

This, at least, is the dominant view expressed in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, a handbook of the New Orthodoxy edited by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn and recently published by the MLA. This collection of articles by twenty-four of the more radical enemies of literature testifies to the ways in which many beautiful works of art have been reduced to cannon fodder in the service of the feminist, gay, black, Marxist, new historicist, reader-response, deconstructionist, psychoanalytic, ethnic, and postcolonial ideologies. Chapters on these approaches and other critical fashions—as well as on historical periods from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the postmodern period—make it fairly plain that the folks who run the MLA regard literature as what Lee Patterson, in *Negotiating the Past*, has called an "agency for authoritarian and conservative forces . . . devised in order to enforce hegemonic interests."

Redrawing the Boundaries also makes it plain that, so far as critical methods go, the editors are not going to waste any time with older conventional approaches: the biography of the author, editorial methods used to establish the text of his poem, the positivist historicism that described the poem's social context, the New Critical "close reading" by which the "meaning" of the poem was established, the comparative assessment of poems and poets by which aesthetic judgments of worth and value are attained, etc. Instead, this collection aims to convert to the New Orthodoxy those "many members of the profession (and especially those burdened with heavy teaching loads who work at some distance from major centers of research activity)" who cannot keep "abreast of significant developments even in their own areas of expertise."

Well, what are the significant developments? As a sign that the times are a-changin', we learn that the term "Renaissance" must go since it "privileges" an age no different from any other (ditto for "the American Renaissance"); the "Enlightenment" had little to do with reason and generated no light; and, "far from being escapist or unreal, Romantic formal idealism remains as real as it gets." Modernism and postmodernism are also futile efforts at periodicity in literary history. Likewise, we learn that "the lyric has lost its centrality in seventeenth-century studies and been replaced by less elitist genres such as the drama." (Egalitarian politics must prevail, even over literature produced in monarchical or royalist societies.) If the Cavalier poets—graceful but "misogynistic"—are read, they

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must be negated by "newly available countervoices in the form of women poets and diarists or puritan controversialists writing at the same time." (No sexism permitted, unless it receives a subliterary refutation.)

Shakespeare, we learn, deserves no special distinction since he "functioned much the same way as others we call hack dramatists —who produced for his company a steady supply of material over which he exerted none of the rights of ownership." (Not only is the author dead, as a concept, so is individual genius. The collectivist is in.) Milton, we discover, is "a crabbed, inflexible figure whose chief interest is to trap the reader into seeing the world as the author insists we must." (But no writer is going to capture us!) And Melville's *Moby-Dick* expresses "the politics of imperialism, with Ahab exploiting Third World labor to plunder the globe's natural resources." (So much for Ahab's Promethean quarrel with God.) Although the clitoris is "the appropriate figure, in rhetorical theory, for the trope of synecdoche itself," feminism is more than "the grim agenda of a bunch of man-hating women's libbers." (What it is is still rather murky.) The old Marxists, according to the New Marxists, are guilty of "foundationalism and essentialism" in assuming the unity of the working class. (So now anything can sail forward under the banner of Karl and Friedrich.) We learn that the gay contingent deplores the "damaging bias toward heterosocial or heterosexist assumptions" in literature, while the psychoanalytic critics tell us that it really doesn't matter: "one must assume one's castration" since, as Lacan suggests, using Dad's language makes us all victims of patriarchal culture. (Unless, of course, we are forced to speak the language of our white conqueror, in which case a postcolonial protest, in any language, is authorized as preferable to anything from the well of pure English undefiled.)

Literature—and the formal study of it in the university—has long exhibited a wonderful variety of genres, themes, techniques, and interests. But what makes the New Orthodoxy of the MLA so dismaying is that its contempt for literature as such (there I go, essentializing again) is spread not by ignoramuses, which we have always had with us, but by university professors themselves, who are the new cultural philistines. And by insisting that there is no discipline here, no center of study, only competing discourses or "rhetorics," they also subvert a graduate education meant to prepare the next generation of teachers.

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Myths of the Fifties

by Hilton Kramer

Oh! and is all forgot? . . . Were we fools then, or are we dishonest now?
—William Hazlitt, in *The Spirit of the Age*

Almost twenty years ago, on one of my periodic assignments in Europe for *The New York Times*, I had a conversation over lunch one day with one of the paper's older foreign correspondents that made a great impression on me. The war in Vietnam had recently ended—for the Americans, that is—and at lunch that day we fell to speculating about what long-term effects that conflict would have on the United States and its role in the world. The Cold War was still raging, of course. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had been expelled from the Soviet Union, yet his reception in the West was anything but cordial. Washington had entered upon a period of *détente* in its relations with the Kremlin, and harsh criticism of the Soviet regime—especially on moral grounds—was frowned upon in high places. Reviewing the first volume of *The Gulag Archipelago* in *The New Yorker*, George Steiner had lately written that "to infer that the Soviet terror is as hideous as Hitlerism is not only a brutal oversimplification but a moral indecency." In other words, there were still a great many willed illusions operating about Communism in general and the Soviet Union in particular. No one then in the White House would have dreamed of calling the Soviet Union and its satellites an "evil empire." About China, too, there was a disposition to suspend criticism, if only because the Communist government was quick to expel Western correspondents who wrote otherwise, and it was important to the highly competitive Western news-gathering organizations to maintain their bureaus in Beijing.

What I was expecting that day over lunch were some sage observations about the way the policy of *détente*, following upon the debacle in Vietnam, was affecting the situation in Europe. But as the wine flowed and our conversation became more animated and confidential, the subject that was uppermost on the mind of my luncheon companion, who had spent many years in both Eastern and Western Europe, turned out to be something else. Rather to my surprise, I was suddenly treated to a long and acute analysis of what was happening to the *Times*'s foreign news coverage as a result of the Vietnam War. This was a subject that had clearly become a cause of considerable worry and professional chagrin for this writer, whose journalistic experience went back to the Second World War and who harbored few illusions about the kind of suffering and social wreckage that Communism had brought to the millions whose lives it had come to dominate.

The vehement, free-wheeling tirade to which I was treated that day touched on many particular people, editors as well as reporters, and many specific episodes, but its essential points were the following: The Vietnam War was proving to be a disaster for the *Times*'s foreign coverage. The paper had

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to send in all those reporters in relays to cover the war. Many of them were young men who had little or no experience of the world. They knew nothing about politics and even less about war. There were exceptions, of course, but very few. Some had never before had a serious foreign assignment or seen any military combat. At one point the *Times* had even sent in a fashion reporter from its Paris bureau. Communism was an abstraction to them. They thought the real enemy in Vietnam was the USA. They weren't Communists themselves, but they proved to be complete suckers for the anti-anti-Communist line that was now ascendant in the Western press. History for a lot of these guys began with the election of John F. Kennedy, and most of them thought Bobby Kennedy was a saint. In Vietnam, they had three ambitions: to get out alive, to win a Pulitzer, and to see America defeated. Their whole view of the world was shaped by Vietnam. They saw the world divided into good guys and bad guys, and we were the bad guys. Then, when they had finished their stint in Vietnam, they had to be rewarded with assignments to more glamorous foreign capitals, where they were likely to understand even less than they had in Saigon, and where they seldom knew the language, the history, or the culture of the countries they were writing about. This was the kind of comic-strip coverage of foreign affairs the *Times* was now getting. All in all, it was probably a good thing that newspaper readers were now less interested in foreign affairs than they used to be. It was keeping the circulation of misinformation at a lower level than it would otherwise be.

I can't say that this conversation changed my view of the world, but it certainly changed the way I read the foreign news columns of the *Times*, and not only the *Times*. It wasn't until a little later, as I watched some of these Vietnam-era correspondents ascend to positions of power on the paper, that I realized they were bringing the same good guy-bad guy scenario, with America as the bad guy, to their coverage of the domestic scene as well.

I thought of this conversation, which I had had in Europe in the 1970s, many times as I was reading my way through David Halberstam's mammoth new book, *The Fifties*.[1] Mr. Halberstam was, of course, one of the *Times* reporters who achieved fame as a correspondent in Vietnam. (It was for his reporting of the war in 1962-64 that he won *his* Pulitzer.) Indeed, he was unusual in this regard in achieving not one but two reputations as a writer on the Vietnam War. The first was as a champion of the Kennedy intervention in Vietnam, the brutal and disastrous removal of the Diem regime in Saigon, and the view that the United States had an important stake in opposing Communism in Vietnam. This was still his view in *The Making of a Quagmire* (1965), his first book on the subject.

> I believe that Vietnam is a legitimate part of that [American] global commitment [he wrote]. A strategic country in a key area, it is perhaps one of only five or six nations in the world that is truly vital to U.S. interests.

And then on the question of American withdrawal from Vietnam:

> What *about* withdrawal? Few Americans who have served in Vietnam can stomach this idea. It means that those Vietnamese who committed themselves fully to the United States will suffer the most under a Communist government, while we lucky few with blue passports retire unharmed; it means a drab, lifeless and controlled society for a people who deserve better. Withdrawal also means that the United States' prestige will be lowered throughout the world, and it means that the pressure of Communism on the rest of Southeast Asia will intensify. Lastly, withdrawal means that throughout the world the enemies of the West will be encouraged to try insurgencies like the one in Vietnam. Just as our commitment in Korea in 1950 has served to discourage overt Communist border crossings

1 *The Fifties*, by David Halberstam; Villard Books, 800 pages, $27.50.

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ever since, an anti-Communist victory in Vietnam would serve to discourage so-called wars of liberation.

This was exactly the view of the Vietnam War in the White House in the Kennedy era—the view of "the best and the brightest" that Mr. Halberstam was soon to castigate.

It was his second reputation as a writer on Vietnam, this time as an implacable foe of the American intervention, that launched Mr. Halberstam as a best-selling author. In the voluminous pages of *The Best and the Brightest* (1972), he was reborn as a ferocious critic of the war and those responsible for conducting it. President Kennedy was now no longer the good guy he had once been, and his associates, who had gone on to serve under President Johnson, were even worse. Only Bobby Kennedy, "who had been primarily responsible for the counterinsurgency enthusiasm," as Mr. Halberstam acknowledged, was absolved from the consequences of his role because of what was said to be his "capacity to grow and change and admit error." Between *The Making of a Quagmire* and *The Best and the Brightest*, Mr. Halberstam had taken time out to join the ranks of the Bobby Kennedy hagiographers by writing *The Unfinished Odyssey of Robert Kennedy*; he also wrote *Ho*, an admiring little book about Ho Chi Minh. These smoothed the way for Mr. Halberstam's own re-emergence as a politically correct anti-war liberal know-it-all in *The Best and the Brightest*.[2] It is in the nature of journalism, of course, for its practitioners to be allowed to reinvent themselves as events require, and Mr. Halberstam proved to be a dab hand at negotiating the terrain separating one realm of received opinion from another. It is the one talent that has never failed him.

It is very much in evidence in *The Fifties*, which in many respects reads like an overloaded 1960s political cartoon-strip about the history of the 1950s. In its treatment of the Korean War, for example, there is no more talk about the importance of discouraging "overt Communist border crossings" and opposing "so-called wars of liberation." There is certainly no talk of the "five or six nations in the world that [are] truly vital to U.S. interests." In this account, the Korean War is very much made to resemble the Vietnam War as depicted in *The Best and the Brightest*. It is so thoroughly Sixties-ized into a post-Stalin-era conflict that it is barely recognizable as a pivotal event in the early history of the Cold War as it was actually conducted by Stalin.

But then, Communism itself, which was the key issue in Korea and which was still ruthlessly expanding its sphere of power and influence in the world, tends to be kept safely offstage in this account of the 1950s. Not the real presence of Communist power in the world of the 1950s, but only what Mr. Halberstam regards as misguided American responses to Communism are what he focuses on at very great length in *The Fifties*. Which is a little like writing a history of the 1930s without taking account of the Depression; what you are left with is a chronicle of effects separated from their causes. We are given an accurate glimpse of Mr. Halberstam's method, if it can be called that, by consulting the entry under "Communism" in the very detailed index of *The Fifties*. This is the entire entry: "Communism, *see* McCarthyism, McCarthy era; *specific countries and conflicts*." It also explains a good deal about *The Fifties* to know that Marlon Brando receives much more attention in its pages than Stalin, whose totalitarian legacy continued to dominate the world scene long after his death in 1953, though not as much attention as is lavished on McDonald's, the hamburger chain, or Joe McCarthy.

Not that Mr. Halberstam has anything new or cogent to add to the history of what it pleases him to call the "McCarthy era." Most of what he writes on the subject is a gloss on David Caute's *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (1978), one of the standard left-wing

2 See Jude Winniski's article, "A Reporter Looks Back at Vietnam. . .", in *The Wall Street Journal*, December 14, 1972.

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chronicles of the period. You can be reasonably certain that if Mr. Halberstam quotes a passage from Whittaker Chambers, it is lifted from Caute; and sure enough, when you look it up in *The Great Fear*, you find exactly the same passage. This is the kind of "research" that has gone into the *The Fifties* whether the subject is J. Robert Oppenheimer, Elvis Presley (who also gets more attention than either Stalin or Khrushchev), C. Wright Mills, or the creation of Levittown housing. What is served up in chapter after chapter of *The Fifties* are banquet-sized portions of yesterday's journalism, reprocessed to conform to the 1960s' myths about the entire post-World War II period.

What dominates this Left-liberal mythology of the Fifties is the notion of an entire society in the grip of politically inspired paranoid fear, abject social conformism, empty-headed consumerism, and spiritual sterility. From a reading of *The Fifties* you would have no idea that the United States emerged in that decade as the unrivaled center of the international art scene, that in the ballets of George Balanchine it had produced one of the towering artistic achievements of the twentieth century, or that its system of public education still commanded standards that from the perspective of the 1990s look almost utopian in intellectual quality. You could have no idea, either, of what the ethos and freedom of the country's civic order consisted of, and certainly no idea of what its rich intellectual life encompassed. Of that intellectual life Mr. Halberstam seems to have remained blissfully ignorant at the time, though he was graduated from Harvard in 1955, and he has apparently been too busy with his journalistic chores to catch up with it in the interim. His is a mind so completely saturated with the cultural clichés of the 1960s, the period of his first success, that no other ideas have ever been allowed to violate its shallow certainties. The sheer spaciousness that came into American life in the 1950s after the ordeals of the Depression era and the fearful trauma of the war years is a closed book to him—as, indeed, are most of the major books of the period.

What Mr. Halberstam attempts to substitute for intellectual command or independent thought in *The Fifties* is a reduction of every historical development to a biographical gloss of the personalities associated with it. Hence the proliferation of personality profiles that inundate this preposterously long book with a veritable Niagara of irrelevant detail. If you believed that it told you something important about the Vietnam War to know in exactly which upscale emporium McGeorge Bundy (I think it was) picked out his wedding silver—which was the kind of thing that made *The Best and the Brightest* a far longer book than it needed to be—then you will also probably think that it tells you something important about the 1950s to know what sort of clothes Senator Robert Taft wore when he was a student at Harvard Law School. (They were "very plain and sober.") Journalists like Mr. Halberstam used to write bad novels filled with stuff like that, but since the Sixties and the advent of the New Journalism they have channeled their literary energies into nonfictional genres that are, in effect, a species of ideological romance. This is what *The Fifties* finally amounts to, and why it is likely to enjoy an immense success.

There is an honorable place for histories that attempt to summarize the salient features of life in a given decade. Frederick Lewis Allen's book about the 1920s, *Only Yesterday*, and Malcolm Muggeridge's *The Thirties* deservedly remain classics of the genre. They can be reread with profit even now. Mr. Halberstam's *The Fifties* belongs to a quite different class of writings, however. On the jacket of the book, his publishers quote from *The Boston Globe* a line that describes Mr. Halberstam "as this generation's equivalent of Theodore White and John Gunther," and that seems to me exactly right. Try rereading the romantic twaddle that White wrote about the presidency of John F. Kennedy or the mendacious whitewash that Gunther provided for Stalin's Russia, and you will have a fair idea of the task Mr. Halberstam has set himself—and met—in writing *The Fifties*.

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Betraying a legacy: the case of the Barnes Foundation

by Roger Kimball

After the Donor's death no picture belonging to the collection shall ever be loaned, sold or otherwise disposed of except that if any picture passes into a state of actual decay so that it is no longer of any value it may be removed for that reason only from the collection.
—from the By-Laws of the Barnes Foundation, December 1922

One of the most striking things in America is the Barnes collection, which is exhibited in a spirit very beneficial for the formation of American artists. There the old master paintings are put beside the modern ones . . . and this bringing together helps students understand a lot of things that academics don't teach.
—Henri Matisse, 1930

The headline of a press release from the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., puts it with disarming frankness: "World Tour of Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation." To be sure, the paintings *are* great. Among the eighty-odd canvases from the legendary Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, now on view at the National Gallery are masterpieces by Renoir, Cézanne, Seurat, Matisse, and Picasso, as well as important works by Gauguin, Henri Rousseau, Vincent Van Gogh, Chaim Soutine, Amedeo Modigliani, and others. Renoir's *Leaving the Conservatoire* (1877), Cézanne's *The Card Players* (1890-92), Seurat's *Models* (1886-88), Matisse's *Le Bonheur de vivre* (1905-6), *Seated Riffian* (1912-13), and *Merion Dance Mural* (1932-33): these and other works—including the first public showing of a stunning early version of Matisse's dance mural that was only recently discovered in Nice—make the exhibition one of the most spectacular samplings of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century French painting anywhere.

Of course, it all sounds marvelous. Never mind that the installation at the National Gallery is rather sterile: is it not terrific that this is only the first of several stops on a worldwide, money-making tour that, as of this writing, includes museums in Paris, Tokyo, and Philadelphia?[1] Think of the crowds: they will almost certainly number in the hundreds of thousands. All those art lovers, hitherto unable to make it to the Barnes Foundation—with its limited hours and out-of-the-way location in a comely sub-

1 "Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation: Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Early Modern" is up at the National Gallery until August 15. The exhibition then travels to the Musée d'Orsay, Paris (September 6, 1993, to January 2, 1994), and the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo (January 21 to April 3, 1994). Dates for its viewing at the Philadelphia Museum of Art are officially "to be determined," presumably because additional venues may yet be added to the exhibition's itinerary. A catalogue of the show, with essays by several hands, has been published by Alfred A. Knopf in association with Lincoln University (318 pages, $65); a paperbound edition ($25) is available only from the National Gallery.

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urb of Philadelphia—will at last be able to buy a ticket and shuffle past these masterworks *en masse*. Richard H. Glanton, president of the Barnes Foundation, now estimates that the tour will bring about $7 million to the Foundation's coffers. Is this not a splendid example of shrewd financial management combined with "cultural democracy" in action? The National Gallery wants you to think so. With some notable exceptions, the press wants you to think so, too. Likewise the current administration of the Barnes Foundation.

But no. The spectacle of the Barnes Foundation in the last couple of years has been anything but encouraging. The public-relations apparatchiks would have us believe that, after decades of "elitism," the Foundation is finally opening its doors and dispensing its treasures to "the people." In fact, the recent behavior of the Foundation's trustees, in collusion with several other institutions and individuals, raises a host of troubling questions: questions about the proper place of art and aesthetic values in a democratic society, first of all, but also questions about the future of private philanthropy in this country. This is hardly the only occasion on which such questions have come to a head. Indeed, the struggle between the prerogatives of artistic excellence and the claims of popular appeal have featured prominently in the recent history of American arts institutions. But the case of the Barnes Foundation adds several new elements to this long-playing drama: a maverick, largely self-taught connoisseur with a genius for business, art, and making enemies; a long and tangled legal battle in which undeclared rivalries have masqueraded as matters of high principle; and, last but not least, large dollops of populist demagoguery.

The protagonist of this saga is Dr. Albert C. Barnes. Born in Philadelphia in 1872, Barnes was brought up in a working-class family, the son of a butcher. He was a talented athlete, boxing and playing baseball semi-professionally to help pay for his schooling. He was also a diligent student, earning a B.S. in 1889 and, from the University of Pennsylvania, an M.D. in 1892 at the age of twenty. After his internship, he traveled to Berlin and Heidelberg to study pharmacology and philosophy. In 1902, he married and, with the German chemist Hermann Hille, started the company Barnes and Hille, which manufactured a proprietary antibiotic compound called Argyrol. Especially useful in fighting infant eye infections, Argyrol was to make Barnes's fortune. In 1907, he bought out Hille's interest in Barnes and Hille, and the following year established the A. C. Barnes Company, which manufactured and marketed Argyrol worldwide.

In addition to his skills as a businessman, Barnes had prodigious intellectual gifts. The philosopher John Dewey, a close friend with whom he corresponded and collaborated for over thirty years, once remarked that for "sheer brain power" he had not met Barnes's equal. His fortune assured, Barnes increasingly turned his attention to the world of art and ideas. His intellectual tastes, like his artistic tastes, proved to be daring, individual, and supremely self-confident. From boyhood, he was fascinated by American black culture—camp meetings, revivals, and the like—and he later acknowledged the indelible impression that black culture had made on his life and outlook. He also became deeply interested in psychology, including the startling new methods propounded by Freud and William James. Pragmatism especially, with its emphasis on the experiential basis of human values, attracted him.

Barnes began collecting art in the early Teens. At first, his high-school friend, the artist William Glackens, helped him buy works. Barnes sent Glackens to Paris in 1912, where, together with the artist Alfred Maurer, he purchased works by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Picasso, Renoir, Pissarro, and others for Barnes. Barnes later went and made his own purchases from dealers and auction houses. He eventually assembled one of the most dazzling collections of modern French painting anywhere in the world. By the time of his death, in 1951, he had acquired 180 works by Renoir, sixty-nine

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by Cézanne, sixty by Matisse, forty-four by Picasso, fourteen by Modigliani, twenty-one by Soutine, eighteen by Henri Rousseau, seven by Van Gogh, six by Seurat, as well as a handful of Gauguins, Toulouse-Lautrecs, Braques, Monets, Manets, and others. But Barnes's taste was hardly confined to French art. He was also an avid collector of Old Master paintings, American Impressionists, Greek and Egyptian antiquities, intricate wrought ironwork, Native American art, and African tribal sculpture. Altogether, the Barnes collection totals nearly twenty-five hundred works of art.

Interested though Barnes was in art, his first passion was education. Deeply influenced by Dewey's theories on education and democracy, he looked to art and aesthetic experience as a primary, if as yet imperfectly tried, means of educating the human spirit in modern democratic society. As he put in the Indenture of Trust that created the Barnes Foundation, he was particularly keen that "plain people, that is, men and women who make their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores, and similar places," have free access to the sustenance that art offers. As the scholar Richard J. Wattenmaker points out in his excellent essay for the catalogue accompanying this exhibition, Barnes began by instituting a six-hour work day at his factory. He installed dozens of artworks at the A. C. Barnes Company and established discussion groups for both white and black workers to ponder the paintings as well as books by Dewey, Bertrand Russell, William James, George Santayana, and others. He started a circulating library and even allowed interested outsiders not associated with the company to attend lectures and discussion groups.

In fact—and this is worth bearing in mind—it was out of these informal factory seminars that the Barnes Foundation with its formal roster of classes and research evolved. Convinced that he was on to something, in 1922 Barnes decided to create and endow a foundation "to be maintained perpetually for education in the appreciation of the fine arts." This cannot be overemphasized: the Barnes Foundation was not created as an art museum; Barnes created it "as an educational experiment under the principles of modern psychology as applied to education."

One of the great strengths of Barnes's taste was its breadth. Of course, it is easy to disagree with some of his judgments about particular works or particular artists: but that can be said of any important critic. What matters in a critic are not so much particular likes and dislikes (though the quality of Barnes's collection shows that he did pretty well on this score, too) but the principles of judgment he employs. At the center of Barnes's philosophy was the effort to understand the distinctively *aesthetic* features of works of art no matter what their period or provenance. He sought, as he wrote in *The Art in Painting* (first edition, 1925), the "intelligent appreciation of paintings from all periods of time."

In this, Barnes resembles critics like Roger Fry, who also attempted to delineate "experimentally" (as Fry put it in his book *Transformations*) the experiences we have "in the face of different works of art of the most diverse kinds." Barnes wished to emphasize the aesthetic qualities of art—the emotional coefficients of line, form, color, texture, and so on. This led him to arrange his collection unchronologically in tableaux designed to highlight the aesthetic, rather than the narrative or thematic, affinities among the works. Many visitors to the Foundation have found this—and the absence of wall labels identifying the works—off-putting. But such were Barnes's strategies to coax students (and visitors) into *looking*. Simple chronological organization and wall labels—to say nothing of that contemporary bane, the "audio tour"—serve to distract the viewer from, well, *viewing*. They encourage him to substitute reading or listening for the harder work of attentive scrutiny. Not that the name of the artist and title of a picture are unimportant; but one should be able to assume that anyone really interested in what he is looking at will go to the trouble to ascertain such historical information. As Barnes noted in *The Art in Painting*,

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> To see as the artist sees is an accomplishment to which there is no short cut, which cannot be acquired by any magic formula or trick; it requires not only the best energies of which we are capable, but a methodical direction of those energies, based upon scientific understanding of the meaning of art and its relation to human nature.

"The meaning of art and its relation to human nature": One should keep this desideratum in mind when the oft-made charge of "formalism" is hurled at Barnes. The truth is, if by "formalism" one means an abstract inventory of artistic technique, then Barnes was the opposite of a formalist. As Mr. Wattenmaker notes in his catalogue essay, "What Barnes sought to convey in front of the painting itself, rather than from a reproduction, was a means of sorting out the varieties of human experience embodied in a painting." The term "formalism" is nowadays unthinkingly used as a negative epithet. But it is worth remembering that what separates good works of art from the bad or mediocre is always in some sense form and never "content." What makes a depiction of the Virgin Mary or a bowl of irises a great work of art is not the Virgin or the flowers but the handling of those subjects by the artist.

All this is by way of background to the current controversy over the future of the Barnes Foundation—a controversy in which the touring exhibition of French masterpieces plays an integral role. At the center of the controversy is the contention that the Barnes Foundation, while it poses as an educational institution, is "really" an art museum that, in exchange for its tax-exempt status, should be more accommodating to the public. This battle is not new. It began shortly after Barnes's death in 1951 when *The Philadelphia Inquirer*—then owned by one of Barnes's chief antagonists, Walter Annenberg—initiated litigation and an editorial campaign against the Foundation in an effort to transform it into a public art museum. As Gilbert M. Cantor notes in his meticulous and informative book, *The Barnes Foundation: Reality vs. Myth*,[2] the *Inquirer*'s campaign against the Barnes Foundation "was not a passing fancy but a ten-year program of harrassment which has not ended even today." Mr. Cantor was writing in 1963; all that needs to be emended is the phrase "ten-year." As owner of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Walter Annenberg had a large hand in directing the attack against the Barnes Foundation. In this context, it is illuminating to compare Mr. Annenberg's activities as a collector with Barnes's. From the Teens—when it was still unpopular—through the Forties, Barnes collected French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art: Mr. Annenberg began assembling his collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art in the late Fifties when every museum in the country was clamoring for the stuff. Barnes used his self-made fortune to found an educational institution based on aesthetic principles that he had painstakingly thought through for himself; in the 1970s, Mr. Annenberg offered the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York some $20 million to establish an educational program that would bear his name, even if it could hardly be said to represent his ideas. Barnes stipulated that the artworks he bequeathed to the Barnes Foundation not be sold, moved, or lent; Mr. Annenberg, when he recently promised to leave his collection of paintings to the Met, stipulated that the works not be sold, moved, or lent. Extraordinary coincidences, to say the least.

One of the most disagreeable features of the effort to destroy the Barnes Foundation has been a campaign of character assassination directed at its founder. This, too, has a long history. Barnes made many enemies. He was aggressive, impatient, and could be overbearing to the point of brutality. He harbored a particular dislike for the academic art-establishment, which he regarded as effete, snobbish, and essentially uninterested in the vital aesthetic core of art. (This indeed was one reason that, near the end of his life, he arranged to cede eventual control of the

2 Consolidated/Drake Press, 1963; second edition 1974.

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Barnes Foundation to Lincoln University, a predominantly black college in Pennsylvania. Mr. Glanton, incidentally, served as counsel to Lincoln before being appointed president of the Barnes Foundation.)

Today it is routinely assumed that Barnes was eccentric to the point of irresponsibility. One journalist, writing recently in a major newspaper, described him as "loony." Paul Richard, chief art writer for *The Washington Post*, went even further. In an extraordinarily ignorant article called "An Imprisoned Collection Breathes at Last," Mr. Richard castigated Barnes's view of art as "doggerel-like." Admitting that the Foundation's collection is "among the strongest" American collections of paintings, he nevertheless insisted that it was also the "silliest, and strangest." "Few American museums have ever been as selfish, as scornfully unwelcoming, as is the Barnes Foundation," Mr. Richard wrote, snidely adding that it "isn't really a museum, but a gallery-cum-school for promulgating Barnes-think." In fact, Mr. Richard has it exactly wrong. The Barnes Foundation is not a gallery-cum-school; it is a school whose resources include art galleries. Is the public given carte-blanche to wander around classrooms at Yale? Of course not. And as for "Barnes-think," well, Mr. Richard gives us a good sense of the quality of his own thinking about art when he goes on to complain that Renoir's women "all look much alike." Perhaps he should have taken a course at the Barnes Foundation.

Journalists such as Mr. Richard have unfortunately lent themselves to the attempt to destroy the Barnes Foundation by voiding its charter and forcing it to become a public art museum. As Gilbert Cantor noted in his book, should this effort succeed, it would be "tantamount to confiscation of an art collection." The ironies are manifold. When he established the Foundation, Barnes wrote that "the purpose of the gift is democratic and educational in the true meaning of those words." Now, under a barrage of populist and anti-elitist slogans, the "true meaning" of democracy and education are rejected for the sake of a grotesque counterfeit.

Before the court granted permission for the world-tour of paintings from the Foundation, Mr. Glanton had proposed selling off various works to finance renovation of the Foundation buildings. So far, that provision of Barnes's trust document has survived the assault. Yet anyone considering the charitable disposition of his own property must be given pause by the cavalier treatment accorded Barnes's Indenture of Trust. The Indenture specifies that "at no time shall there be any society functions commonly designated receptions, tea parties, dinners, banquets, dances, musicales, or similar affairs" held at the Barnes Foundation. But last fall Mr. Glanton gave an elaborate reception and lunch party there at which not only the press but also various society figures, including Mrs. Walter Annenberg, were present. The Indenture specifies that the administration building attached to the gallery "be used as classrooms"—and so it was until Mr. Glanton moved the Foundation's offices into the building, converting Mrs. Barnes's former sitting room into his private office. The Indenture specifically prohibits the "copying of any of the works of art in the Barnes Foundation by any person whatsoever." Barnes was particularly opposed to color reproductions of works of art because they give a distorted impression of the original. And yet the exhibition catalogue, published by Alfred A. Knopf, contains hundreds of illustrations, "154 in full color," as a press release boasts. Another fascinating coincidence: Samuel I. Newhouse happens to own Knopf and the Newhouse Foundation happened to make a $2 million grant to Lincoln University just before Knopf was granted permission to publish the catalogue. And of course the Indenture prohibits lending any works from the collection: that provision, too, has obviously been egregiously violated.

Albert Barnes gave his fortune to perpetuate the idea that democracy was not inimical to culture. Mr. Glanton and many others are determined to prove him wrong, even if it means making a travesty of his ideas and trampling on the principle of private property. It is disheartening to behold.

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A great good girl: Dreiser's "Jennie Gerhardt"

by Joseph Epstein

People read novels for many varying reasons. They look to novels for information, wisdom, beauty, romantic inspiration, and diversion: sometimes for all these things at once, sometimes for one of these things preponderantly over all the others. In *A Legacy*, the excellent novel by Sybille Bedford, one character says of another that she now reads two novels a day, adding "The next stage is chocolates."

For some readers, novels are as chocolates, things to be gobbled up till love or something better comes along to pass the time; for others, novels seem scarcely less essential than the air they breathe, and people exist—I happen to be one of them—who feel they have been educated chiefly by novels. For still some readers, a novel must have an element of elevation—it ought, in a non-Rotarian sense, to lift the spirit; for yet others, novels are best when they are non-committal and do not go beyond a strong presentation of the facts, the starker and darker these facts the better. But even among the most serious readers, all of whom are ready to agree on the general importance of the novel, there is no real agreement about what makes for a successful novel.

Serious readers of novels are likely to disagree above all about the novels of Theodore Dreiser. ("My husband reads Dreiser and actually enjoys him," I recently heard a woman "exclaim," a word I use with some precision.) The chief reason for the controversy about Dreiser is that his powerful novels can be a direct affront to the idea that the novel is an aesthetic object. The occasional but quite genuine crudity of Dreiser's prose has often been remarked upon, perhaps by no one more wittily than by H. L. Mencken, who said that Dreiser had "an incurable antipathy to the *mot juste*." Quite a bit to it. Dreiser was at his worst when he was trying to be at his best. Usually this was at those times when he attempted to play either the poet or the wise man. Even his greatest admirers—and Mencken was among them—feel the need to italicize his verbal clumsiness. As Mencken noted: "Every reader of the Dreiser novels must cherish astounding specimens—of awkward, platitudinous marginalia, of whole scenes spoiled by bad writing, of phrases as brackish as so many lumps of sodium hyposulphite." Mencken goes on to say: "I often wonder if Dreiser gets anything properly describable as pleasure out of this dogged accumulation of threadbare, undistinguished, uninspiring nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, pronouns, participles and conjunctions." There is no compelling reason to believe that Dreiser ever did.

Finding aesthetic fault with Theodore Dreiser is easy, a game the whole family can play. The very first sentence of *Jennie Gerhardt*, for example, contains an obvious tautology, where Jennie is referred to as "a young girl of eighteen" (as opposed, one wants to shoot back at the author, to an old or perhaps middle-aged girl of eighteen?). The second sentence isn't worthy of being

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engraved in marble either, for there one discovers Jennie's mother has "a frank, open countenance." Four or five more rather strenuous clichés turn up before this first paragraph of seven sentences is complete.

But after having noted this, after having established one's own superiority to Dreiser in the niceties of language, one has to admit that this opening paragraph does what he wants it to do, not perhaps brilliantly but very effectively: it sets his scene, it gets him into his story, it establishes two of his principal characters. For all of Dreiser's famous ineptitude as a stylist, whenever a dramatic scene or delicate passage has to be rendered, Dreiser's instincts seem to take over, his prose shifts into cruise control, and he executes the scene or passage with a sure and often impressive touch. Making fun of Dreiser's prose is, finally, snobbery, a game no one in the family should play. "I often think the criticism of Dreiser as a stylist at times betrays a resistance to the feelings he causes readers to suffer," Saul Bellow has written. "If they say he can't write, they need not express those feelings."

A writer of greater personal refinement and wider culture could not have produced novels of the same power as Theodore Dreiser's. ("Remove the vices of a novelist and his virtues vanish too," wrote V. S. Pritchett.) But then such a writer would not have taken up the subjects that Dreiser did: the struggle for existence, the stirrings of uncontrollable yet hopeless desire, the shame of being low-born, the at best pyrrhic battle for happiness. If a tradition for Dreiser is wanted, the line he belongs in is that of Balzac and Dostoevsky, all three being novelists who, in taking on the large subjects, make the question of style seem, at least while reading them, quite beside the point.

Jennie Gerhardt, published in 1911, is, I believe, Theodore Dreiser's best novel. In it our interest is not riven, as it is in *Sister Carrie*, between the onward and upward career of Carrie Meeber and the downward and outward career of George Hurstwood. Nor does it contain the *longueurs* of an otherwise powerful novel like *An American Tragedy*. It is more concentrated than the novels written around the career of Frank Cowperwood and less marred by the intrusive application of the Darwinian idea of survival of the fittest that dominates these novels. Yet, strong as *Jennie Gerhardt* is, my sense is that it is one of the least taught—which is probably the same as saying, least read—of Dreiser's novels, which is a mistake, a sadness, and an injustice.

In his posthumously published *My Life as Author and Editor*, H. L. Mencken recounts his reaction to reading *Jennie Gerhardt* in manuscript. Dreiser had sent him his manuscript hoping to discover a friend and supporter for this, his second novel. Dreiser's first novel, *Sister Carrie*, published in 1900, had run into the then active censors in American life and he felt that it had also been sabotaged by his publisher, Frank Doubleday, of Doubleday, Page & Company, whose wife was said to have intensely disliked the novel. After having read *Jennie Gerhardt*, Mencken shot off a letter to Dreiser which, in part, reads:

> The story comes upon me with great force; it touches my own experience of life in a hundred places; it preaches (or perhaps I had better say exhibits) a philosophy of life that seems to me to be sound; altogether I get a powerful effect of reality, stark and unashamed. It is drab and gloomy, but so is the struggle for existence. It is without humor, but so are the jests of that great Comedian who shoots at our heels and makes us do our grotesque dancing. . . .

What Dreiser could not have known was that he was the American novelist for whom Mencken was waiting. Mencken had his own program for American fiction, which was to oppose the treacly romantic and hopelessly thin stuff produced by the genteel tradition. Dreiser was, as Mencken writes, "the stick with which I principally flogged the dullards of my country, at least in the field of beautiful letters." When Mencken wrote about *Jennie Gerhardt* in his magazine *The Smart Set*, in a review in the November 1911 issue carrying

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the title "A Novel of the First Rank," he held back neither the cannon balls nor the confetti, blasting the dominant tendencies of American fiction under the cover of praising Theodore Dreiser. "Hot from it," he says in the opening paragraph of his review of the novel, "I am firmly convinced that *Jennie Gerhardt* is the best American novel I have ever read, with the lonesome but Himalayan exception of *Huckleberry Finn*, and so I may as well say it aloud and at once and have done with it."

Some might argue that a little fish tale called *Moby-Dick* ought to be allowed as another exception and a Henry James novel or two might be tossed in as additional exceptions. But none of these would quite have served Mencken's polemical purposes. Mencken's admiration for *Jennie Gerhardt* was redoubled because in it he found confirmation of his own philosophical views. Perhaps it was not so much a fully formed philosophy as a philosophical skepticism that both men shared. Mencken formulated his own skepticism best when he set out, in one of the essays in his *Prejudices* volumes, what he thought was unknowable:

> No one knows Who created the visible universe, and it is infinitely improbable that anything properly describable as evidence on the point will ever be discovered. No one knows what motives or intentions, if any, lie behind what we call natural laws. No one knows why man has his present form. No one knows why sin and suffering were sent into this world—that is, why the fashioning of man was badly botched.

In other words, everything was unknowable, according to Mencken, that it is essential to know if we are to have any hope of understanding our purpose in life. Mencken not only believed that these things were unknowable but also thought that anyone who claimed to know them was a quack, charlatan, con artist, or damned fool, and ought, therefore, to be throttled, at least in prose.

What pumped up Mencken's spirits so about Dreiser—and he felt similarly about the novels of Joseph Conrad—was that in Dreiser he had found the novelist who gave artistic flesh to the bare bones of his own strong ideas about the unfathomableness of the universe. In his novels Dreiser, for Mencken, exposed not "the empty event and act, but the endless mystery out of which it springs"; and, more, Dreiser's was "the irresistible creative passion of a genuine artist, standing spell-bound before the impenetrable enigma that is life, enamoured by the strange beauty that plays over its sordidness, challenged to a wondering and half-terrified sort of representation of what passes understanding."

True enough, passages in Dreiser do at first seem a perfect match with the main thrust of Mencken's ideas. Late in *Jennie Gerhardt*, for example, Lester Kane, the well-born and successful businessman who risks social ostracism and eventually financial ruin by living out of wedlock with Jennie, a woman socially much beneath him—this same Lester Kane tells Jennie, who has already herself taken a number of pretty good shots from life, that "all of us are more or less pawns. We're moved about like chess men by circumstances over which we have no control." A few moments later Lester adds: "After all, life is more or less of a farce. It's a silly show. The best we can do is to hold our personalities intact. It doesn't even appear that integrity has much to do with it." One can almost see H. L. Mencken, after reading that passage, doing a little touchdown dance in the end zone of his heart.

But of course neither Mencken nor (much less) Dreiser can be boiled down to his ideas. His ideas alone do not explain the wondrous exuberance of H. L. Mencken, of whom Walter Lippmann, in an essay of 1926, wrote that "when you can explain the heightening effect of a spirited horse, of a swift athlete, of a dancer really in control of his own body, when you can explain why watching them you feel more alive yourself, you can explain the quality of his influence." As for Dreiser, in the realm of ideas, he was a mess; and the more he delved into ideas, the messier he became. He dabbled with fascism and Com-

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munism, and was tainted with anti-Semitism. But so powerful was his natural talent that even the world's worst ideas couldn't destroy it. One of the things that make *Jennie Gerhardt* Dreiser's best novel is that it was written before he had really become engaged by ideas at all.

Theodore Dreiser himself had taken a few pretty good shots from life before he wrote *Jennie Gerhardt*. The first shot was his early life. Dreiser's father, a German immigrant, never recovered his ambition after a fire that destroyed his small business and caused his financial fall. Theodore was born five years after this disaster, in 1871, the ninth of ten children in a family that never climbed out of poverty and alternated in its emotional states among defeat, shame, religious terror, and social disgrace. His sisters went off with married men, and one among them returned home pregnant. He had brothers who lapsed into alcoholism and ne'er-do-wellism. The family moved often, once, in Vincennes, Indiana, living above a brothel. To these social disadvantages can be added Dreiser's personal unattractiveness. H. L. Mencken put it gently when of Dreiser he wrote that "the boon of beauty has been denied him." Dreiser had buck teeth and a right eye that refused to look straight ahead. He was tall and gangly, socially inept, sexually on fire, and flush with every kind of insecurity.

Through the sponsorship of a kind and generous high-school teacher, Dreiser spent a year at Indiana University. He then worked at a number of odd jobs, ending up in journalism. He was employed by newspapers in Chicago, Saint Louis, Toledo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo. In 1894, a man named Arthur Henry, his city editor on *The Toledo Blade*, encouraged him to write fiction. Dreiser was then twenty-three years old. It was not till six years later, after he had married, that Dreiser published *Sister Carrie*, a book that, in its first appearance, brought him royalties totaling $68.40 and the obloquy of reviewers who thought he wrote an immoral book because he had failed to punish Carrie Meeber, his heroine, for living outside conventional morality. (It is another sign of Dreiser's power that radical changes in conventional morality—adults living together before marriage, easy access to abortion—have not made his novels seem historically dated or otherwise irrelevant.)

Dreiser had begun to work on *Jennie Gerhardt* soon after finishing but before publishing *Sister Carrie* in 1900. But the commercial and critical defeat dealt him by the publication of the earlier book sent him swirling into a nervous breakdown and a long bout of unemployment of the kind he had prophetically described George Hurstwood undergoing in *Sister Carrie*. Here his brother Paul, a successful songwriter of the day, came to his rescue, installing him in a sanatorium and helping him financially until he recovered. Dreiser took seven years before returning to the writing of *Jennie Gerhardt* and it was three more years before he saw it published.

Mencken, while acknowledging that Dreiser's fiction could be extremely uneven, felt that "his writing does not rise or fall with any regularity; he neither improves steadily nor grows worse steadily." Mencken did feel that it is in *Jennie Gerhardt* that Dreiser's view of the world begins "to take on coherence and to show a general tendency." I would myself go further to say that Dreiser reached the top of his form with the publication of this novel, because, among other reasons, he hadn't yet been freighted with too many of the ideas that would later overload though never destroy his work. He had already been intellectually astonished by reading the evolutionist Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, which, he later remarked, "took every shred of belief away from me." But he had not yet made sedulous attempts to master the mechanistic theory of life from the chemical physiology of Jacques Loeb or the tenets of modern psychology from the Austrian psychoanalyst A. A. Brill. One begins to see the sorry influence of these studies in such later novels of Dreiser's as *An American Tragedy* and *The Bulwark*, with all their talk of "chemisms," moths hovering rather too patently around flames, and other lower

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forms of animal life consuming one another.

In *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser was still working out his vision of life, letting facts suggest ideas instead of the other way around. Dreiser's positions had not yet hardened, nor had his view of destiny been fixed. With the passing of time Dreiser may have grown intellectually more sophisticated—as Ellen Moers shows in her brilliant book *Two Dreisers* (1969)—but it is far from clear that, in Dreiser, whose genius was of the natural kind, sophistication necessarily made him better.

Dreiser had superior novelistic instincts. He knew that what was important is conveying life, and he knew, too, that while good intentions could have bad effects, the opposite was equally possible. A perfect illustration in *Jennie Gerhardt* is the cold disdain in which Jennie's illegitimate infant child Vesta is held by Jennie's father, old Gerhardt, for whom the child is an all too vivid sign of his family's disgrace and precipitate decline in the world. Dreiser writes:

> Although opposed to the presence of it [the child], and irritated by the thought of having it in the house, he felt as if he ought not to say anything. Jennie was working. Still he could not help considering it from a grand-parently standpoint, particularly since the child was a human being possessed of a soul, and subject to baptism and union with the church. He thought it over and wondered if the baby had been baptized.

After the infant is baptized, Gerhardt's view is utterly changed. "However much the daughter had sinned, the infant was not to blame. It was a helpless, puling, tender thing, demanding his sympathy and his love. Gerhardt felt his heart go out to the little child, and yet he could not yield his position all in a moment." Yet, from that moment on in fact, Gerhardt, for all his narrowness, takes a strong and righteous interest in the child. "There would always be her soul to consider. He would never again be utterly unconscious of her soul." Later the relationship between the child Vesta and her old-world grandfather will provide one of the small but winning touches in the novel.

What is most interesting about this is that Dreiser was no friend of organized religion. Very far from it. He had grown up under the stiff harness of his father's grinding and tyrannical piety. He lived his own life untouched by religion in the traditional or conventional sense. If anything, he was likely to have been contemptuous of it. He thought, as he says in the pages of *Jennie Gerhardt*, "unseeing man, narrowly drawing himself up in judgement," which clergymen in Dreiser's day were confidently wont to do, pathetic in the extreme. Yet for all this Dreiser attributes to religion—or, more specifically, old Gerhardt's fanatical attachment to his religion—one of the most good-hearted acts in the novel. As a novelist, Dreiser was smart enough not to allow his ideas or even his prejudices to get in the way of the higher—that is to say, the novelistic—truth about the human heart.

In the same way, there are no true villains in Dreiser, only people, the duller among whom act out their assigned roles. Those who choose not to act out their assigned roles, but to leave the track, often do so with tragic consequences. Not even Lester Kane's rather spiritually calloused brother Robert qualifies as villainous, for, rivalrous though he is and pleased though he is to have his brother set on the sidelines by his socially outraging arrangement with Jennie, even Robert Kane softens toward the novel's close and wishes a rapprochement with his brother. The reason there are no true villains in Dreiser's novelistic world is that none are needed. The world, with its many rigid conventions, and the cosmos, by arbitrarily conferring strong appetites on unusual people, supply a sufficient number of traps to keep everyone busy. "Hell," Lester Kane thinks, "what a tangle life was, what a mystery!" I believe that Dreiser thought this, too, and thinking it made him a better novelist.

To be impressed by the mystery that life presents, though perhaps a beginning, is not

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in itself sufficient to make a novelist great. For that at least partial penetration into the mystery of life—or into many of its sideshow mysteries—is required. In Dreiser, one not only regularly finds such penetration but finds that many of his novelistic discoveries have taken decades to sink into the popular culture. In the unforgettable figure of George Hurstwood, for example, Dreiser discovered what the self-help industry now calls "the masculine mid-life crisis": the poor man who feels time running out on him, which is a prefatory sign of his running out on his wife with a younger woman. Although she represents much more than this, the character Jennie Gerhardt is a demonstration (roughly seventy years before the man, a rabbi, came around to write the best-seller about it) of bad things happening to good people. On this role of prophet not infrequently played by the writer, someone once told Dostoevsky that some of his characters were not true to life. Dostoevsky replied that this was nonsense and told this fellow, in effect, to stick around, for life would soon turn up exactly the kind of characters he had created. Life, as we ought by now to know, often contrives to imitate art.

"I want you to look facts in the face," Lester at one point says to Jennie, but one of these facts is that this is precisely what he himself cannot do. Yet looking facts in the face is something that, in any Dreiser novel as in life, most people have a difficult time doing. It is not by any means plain that Dreiser himself could always do so. He is doubtless speaking for himself when he has Lester Kane, in the midst of his almost endless wobbling over whether to marry Jennie or to leave her or to continue in his state of easy drift, think: "the sum and substance of every man's life was unrest and dissatisfaction."

But then Dreiser could touch more tender notes, too, as when he remarks, of the relationship between the child Vesta and her grandfather, "there is an inexplicable affinity between old age and childhood which is as lovely as it is pathetic." He knew, too, doubtless from personal experience, as he has Lester Kane reflect in this novel, that "people turn so quickly from weakness or the shadow of it" and that the worst social disease of all is failure. Dreiser was never deceived about the importance of money in social arrangements; and, as he puts it in this novel, "money was essential: for real distinction outside of the arts, a great deal of it was needed; and even in the arts the man with money was so much more distinguished." He wasn't too bad on the little touches, either, for late in the novel a minor character named O'Brien appears of whom Dreiser writes that he "was suave, good-natured, and well-meaning, even if he was a lawyer."

From a larger perspective, Dreiser has put more memorable characters into American fiction than perhaps any other novelist. Carrie Meeber and George Hurstwood from *Sister Carrie*, Clyde Griffiths and Sondra Finchley from *An American Tragedy*, Frank Cowperwood from *The Financier* and *The Titan*, and, perhaps his most impressive creation of all, Jennie from *Jennie Gerhardt*. In Jennie, Dreiser accomplished something that Dickens often attempted but never really did bring off: the creation of a thoroughly good yet entirely believable young woman.

In an impressive way, the character of Jennie Gerhardt stands as a refutation of the theory that is supposed to lie behind much of Theodore Dreiser's fiction. If for most of us life is a battle waged between egotism and altruism, for Jennie it never seems anything of the kind: egotism never has a chance. In Jennie, the sense of the pathetic is strong; decency is instinctive. When Lester Kane fumbles for reasons why he is so strongly drawn to Jennie, a young woman of good looks but no subtlety or intellectual penetration of any kind, the best he can come up with is that "Jennie has something—a big, emotional pull of some kind which held him." Lester never says it, nor does Dreiser come near to doing so, but what Jennie possesses is an uncorrupted goodness.

Dreiser puts Jennie through horrendous suffering in this novel, yet, somehow, she is not diminished by it. She is, on the contrary,

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made larger by her suffering, even though it is not always suffering that she understands, or can hope to understand. In the end, Jennie is a larger character—a larger human being—than Lester, who at the end of his life thinks he is without illusions. Jennie, in her more tentative, more inchoate, understanding of life is by far the more impressive. When traveling in Europe, noting how little lasts of even the grandest civilizations, she asks—and it is difficult not to think she is speaking for Dreiser here—if anything matters "except goodness—goodness of heart? What else was there that was real?" Sometimes Dreiser intercedes in this matter of understanding. And when the cruelest blow of all is landed upon Jennie, the loss of a child, Dreiser writes: "If only some counselor of eternal wisdom could have whispered to her that obvious and consoling truth—there are no dead." That is not a moment one thinks of as characteristically Dreiserian.

In her ungrudging puzzlement about the world, it is Jennie who comes closer than anyone in this novel, or perhaps in any of Dreiser's novels, to grasping the true mystery of life—not solving it, but grasping it. Though her mind never acquired any specialized knowledge, Dreiser tells us, and though she hadn't anything like conventional intellectual interests, Jennie did, owing to her experience, have "the feeling that the world moved in some strange, unstable way." Dreiser continues:

> It was not known clearly by any one, apparently, what it was all about. People were born and died. Some believed that the world had been made six thousand years before. Some that it was millions of years old. Some, like her father, thought that there was a personal God, some that there was no God at all. For her part she felt there must be something—a guiding intelligence which produced all the beautiful things—the flowers, the stars, the trees, the grass. Nature was so beautiful. If at times certain events were cruel, yet there was this beauty persisting. And color, tones, feeling, laughter, the joy of character, the beauty of youth—how these softened in between the harsh faces of hunger, cold, indifference, greed. She could not understand what it was all about, but still, as in her youth, it was beautiful. One could live, somehow, under any circumstances.

In the end perhaps it is not so surprising that Dreiser should have been so impressed, not to say entranced, by the mystery presented by life. This ugly, clumsy, in every way inelegant man, reared in poverty, ignorance, and superstition, lived to be one of his country's greatest writers. Was this not in itself mystery, indeed astonishment, enough? As with so many other mysteries, there is nothing much for it but to stand back in amazement and, because in this particular case the result of the mystery is a great artist, in appreciative awe.

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Honoré Daumier: public & private

by Karen Wilkin

For a long time, all Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) meant to me were the prints in my father's office. Like many of his fellow physicians, at least the cultivated ones with leftist pedigrees from the 1930s, my father had a small group of Daumier's savage comments on the nineteenth-century medical profession on display. (If he had been a lawyer, like some of my school friends' parents, they would have been the caricatures of judges and barristers; dentists, for some reason, favored dancers and pensive young women—working-class, of course—by the Soyer brothers.) As a child I didn't like the images much, and I was puzzled by how they were always described as "real" when they were so clearly cut from some magazine or newspaper. I recall, too, struggling with the captions, full of odd contractions that I'd never seen in my French books and words that, even when I could find them in the Larousse, didn't make much sense in context; they certainly weren't *funny* the way I expected cartoons to be. I remember clearly how surprised I was when I discovered that the caricaturist Daumier was also a painter. Was it at the Met or in a high-school art history class? I remember liking the economical little sketches of laundresses, with their clear, massive forms, better than the caricatures, and not liking *The Third-Class Carriage* even though the teachers at Music and Art, politically correct for the time, praised it highly for its sympathetic treatment of the impoverished and downtrodden as dignified individuals and its sensitive portrayal of the unglamorous side of daily life. One of them even suggested that we all sketch on the subway as a way of following Daumier's example.

I still don't like *The Third-Class Carriage* very much—and my mother has the prints from my father's office—but I have looked at a fair amount of Daumier's work since then, and I thought I knew everything I needed to know about him, from his piercing social commentary to his obsession with the Don Quixote story and his fluent ability to suggest form and character with rapidly rendered masses of dark and light. Daumier was, I thought, simply one of those minor but extremely accomplished nineteenth-century illustrator-artists, like Gavarni or Steinlen or even Constantin Guys—Baudelaire's paradigmatic "Painter of Modern Life"—whose work I didn't actively seek out but which rewarded my attention when I came upon it. (Steinlen's cats come under a different heading, but that's another story.) There were some sculptures, most notably one of a questionable type known as "Ratapoil," in ragged top hat and frock coat, whose wide-legged stance had been suggested by Charles Millard as a possible source for Degas's uncanny bronze *Little Dancer Fourteen Years Old*. There was that sideline in painting, perhaps most convincing a Goya-inspired series about the flight of refugees. And that was about it.

I continued to think of Daumier primarily

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as a master of reproducible graphic images, especially in the nineteenth century's hot new medium, lithography. I believed that Daumier, like his contemporary Gustave Courbet, was a man of the arts with a rigorous social conscience. But unlike Courbet, who "disguised" his subversive intentions with some of the most difficult and ambitious painting of the period, Daumier, I thought, expended most of his energy on overt satire and caricatures intended for the general public. In fact, this view was not wholly mistaken. For most of his life, until his eyesight failed in his final years, Daumier *was* principally known as a caricaturist, a satiric commentator in widely read magazines such as *Le Charivari*. He had a knack, much appreciated by witty Parisians, for the economical, pitiless indictment and was admired for his trenchant characterizations and telling "stagings"—this in an era when the political cartoon reached new heights of complexity, sophistication, and accomplishment. Delacroix, as a young man, was an adroit political cartoonist, but he gave it up when he began to attract official attention for his paintings in the Salons, a wise decision in an age of aggressive censorship. Daumier, who was not a product of the Academy—he would be described these days by astute art historians as "marginalized"—had, you might think, less at stake than an artist bent on an official career, but he was not immune to censorship; in 1832, he spent six months in prison for publishing a cartoon depicting the rotund Louis-Philippe as Rabelais's grotesque character Gargantua. Daumier continued to publish images fiercely critical of contemporary French society, displaying sinister physicians, threatening judges, brutal butchers, unlovely matrons, and more to his fellow Parisians, as though serving as the city's self-appointed conscience. As I said, I thought I knew what I ought to know about Daumier.

The splendid recent exhibition "Daumier Drawings" at the Metropolitan made me realize how ignorant I was.[1] The show concentrated not on the familiar lithographs but on Daumier's marvelous, varied drawings, quite likely the most significant part of his activity as an artist, at least to present-day eyes—more of that later—and revealed him to be a far more inventive and subtle practitioner than I had ever imagined. Now that I've seen "Daumier Drawings" a number of times, I don't know why I was surprised. As one of the exhibition catalogue's informative essays points out, Daumier drew daily and copiously, as a way of recording observations, testing characterizations, and developing a lexicon of readily identifiable types, gestures, and poses for the caricatures he produced in such quantities. In his own day, these fluid, searching studies were known to a perceptive group of Daumier's contemporaries who valued highly his vigorous draftsmanship. Writers and artists including Baudelaire, Champfleury, Delacroix, and Corot all praised Daumier's drawings. Henry James, writing after Daumier's death, thought he was wonderful, too, although he was speaking chiefly of the published caricatures and described the pleasure of acquiring a group of them for ridiculously small sums. Yet for the most part, Daumier's drawings (as opposed to his published works) remained unknown to twentieth-century audiences; the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was the first to focus on his works on paper—in chalk, charcoal, conté crayon, ink, and watercolor—apart from his caricatures.

The differences and similarities between the two separate but intimately related bodies of work are extremely revealing. (The installation at the Met encouraged comparisons by including a group of lithographs,

1 "Daumier Drawings" was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from February 26 through May 2, 1993. The exhibition was organized by the Met in collaboration with the Städelsche Kunstinstitut and Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt, where it was seen from November 17, 1992, through January 17, 1993. A catalogue, with essays by Colta Ives, Margret Stuffmann, and Martin Sonnabend, has been published by the Metropolitan Museum/Harry N. Abrams (268 pages, $60; $39.95 paper).

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outside the main exhibition rooms, along with a selection of paintings and sculptures in closer proximity to the drawings.) Together, the caricatures and drawings reminded us of Daumier's position as an "outsider" artist of his day. His rather ad hoc, empirical training, reflected in both his idiosyncratic subject matter and individual style, was very much at odds with the rigorously standardized system at the Ecole des Beaux-arts. Known as essentially a commercial artist lacking academic training, Daumier nonetheless seems to have longed for the dignity and presumed seriousness of the academic artist; drawing was a principal tool in his ceaseless effort to bring his skill up to what he perceived as that exalted level.

Daumier's method was very much his own. There is the occasional, unexpected rendering of a subject that would have been demanded of a student at the academy—a religious scene, or one from classical history or La Fontaine's fables—but in general his self-directed course of study was quite unlike that prescribed for aspiring official artists. Instead of drawing from casts of the antique or nude models posed to look as much as possible like classical statues, he recorded his recollections and observations of the daily life of the modern city. In his private drawings, whether rapid notes or developed compositions, Daumier was a more forgiving observer than in his cartoons, presenting his subjects more generally, without any of the exaggerated detail that rendered them grotesque or ridiculous in his lithographs, but always capturing a sense of urgency and impending change. Like his published caricatures, Daumier's best drawings depend on a vivid exchange between line, mass, and shadow that is in itself almost as dramatic and nervy as the poses and situations he chose to depict. His taste for the particular gesture, the particular facial expression, the particular stance that could serve to express character, social rank, state of mind, or even, on occasion, political position, led him to delight in particulars of anatomy, so his figures appear to have been conceived from the inside out. But where he sought in his caricatures the single, clearest, most revealing contour or mass, in his most powerful drawings he aimed at a sense of ambiguity and flux, suggesting an almost Michelangelesque rippling musculature with freely drawn hooks and crotchets that are at once descriptive and compelling simply as marks. (Daumier's most successful sculptures share this quality: an accumulation of small pats of clay becomes a tactile equivalent for quick touches of the pen or crayon. In the best of the sculptures, such as the bronze relief of a stream of emigrants, the vigorous surface both implies motion and makes the work seem to happen as we watch.)

Daumier apparently drew from memory, relying on his keen observer's eye, his understanding of the body's structure, and his ability, like that of a great actor or dancer, to isolate the most eloquent, telling gesture. His subject matter was the everyday, the unheroic, the ordinary, presented with an economy and freshness that made the most unprepossessing subject seem charged with significance. The art historian Robert L. Herbert has written persuasively about the active role of the *flâneur* in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Herbert maintains that the man of apparent leisure, idling on the new Haussmann-built boulevards, was not simply a passive spectator but also an alert participant in the public life of nineteenth-century Paris. Like the Impressionist painters who used the spectacle of that public life as their first subject matter, the *flâneur* saw all and bore witness to the life of the times. Daumier's drawings, although made earlier than Haussmann's final transformations of old Paris, seem to anticipate and encapsulate the function of the active eye.

To modern-day eyes, the most appealing of Daumier's drawings are also the most private, made for the artist's own education and use: groups of studies on a single page, evidence of his probing of variant poses and alternative compositions—thinking made visible. In some, clusters of tremulous line all but break free of the forms they allude to, suggesting movement and mass at the same

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time that they vibrate with insistent modernity on the page; in others, bold swipes of crayon or washes of dark and light function in similar ways. Drawings of this type speak with particular force to current sensibilities, because they are fragmentary and because they are immediate. There is no doubt that they were private studies, made for the artist alone, unlike the familiar published images, which were quite consciously aimed at a public audience, but it would be wrong to read these "private" works as reflections of a desire for untrammeled self-expression, free of the constraints of the "public" efforts. Until the generation of the Impressionists, being a serious "fine-art artist" meant having a public career, complete with submissions to the Salons, awards, and state commissions. Some were better at working the system than others—Delacroix versus Géricault, for example—while still others (most notably, Courbet) managed to make resistance to the system into a career, but that was exceptional. Despite his resistance to the current government and to corrupt practices, manifested in his satirical lithographs, Daumier would probably have liked nothing better than to have been one of the acclaimed official masters. He was, moreover, no misunderstood genius struggling in opposition to the system, but, rather, a successful, admired artist-illustrator-satirist, a sort of George Bernard Shaw of drawing, perhaps; in any case, the conception of the artist as rejected visionary starving in the proverbial garret didn't really exist until the advent of a true avant-garde in the 1860s.

The bulk of the Metropolitan's exhibition was made up of private drawings, yet these rapidly executed studies were only a small part of Daumier's activity as a draftsman. His contemporaries frequently commented on the vast number of drawings that filled his studio, most of them related to his contributions to *Le Charivari*. Despite their proliferation, few of these have survived, and few were in the exhibition. Almost equally rare, but happily well represented, were highly finished drawings, produced during the intervals when Daumier was free of his obligations to the magazine; *Le Charivari* ceased publication for a while following the upheavals of 1848 and briefly terminated its connection with Daumier in the 1860s. Fully developed with watercolor washes, these finished drawings appear to have been intended for collectors, as "substitutes" for paintings on canvas, which the brilliant draftsman never felt he had mastered. The stiffness of many of the canvases, in contrast to the seeming effortlessness of the drawings, bears this out. Like many artists, Daumier was more uninhibited on paper. Some of the watercolors were astonishing for their freedom and their inspired use of broken tones; one late landscape even seemed oddly prescient of Cézanne's loose-jointed late watercolors.

If it seems less easy than we might have thought to separate the public and the private Daumier, we should remember that in the matter of technique, there was little separation between his recording of fleeting thoughts and his making of caricatures for reproduction. There were the formal differences engendered by the character of, say, pen and ink as opposed to crayon, but the process of making lithographic images was not intrinsically different from drawing on paper. Lithography—drawing on stone—had rapidly gained in popularity since its invention in the late eighteenth century, precisely because it was the most direct of all the reproductive print media; the artist was obliged to reverse his images, as with any print, but he simply drew directly on the prepared stone surface with greasy crayon or with special ink. The tonal inflections of the drawing were, for the most part, the tonal inflections of the finished print. There was no need to create laborious equivalents with massed incisions or textures, as one did in engraving or etching.

The evidence of the show suggested that either this process was enormously sympathetic to Daumier's innate gifts or his long activity as a lithographer influenced every other aspect of his making art. In spite of variations in degree of finish or elaboration,

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in clear massing or uneasy modeling between the public and private images, the private works declare themselves not so much by formal differences as by those of mood and accent. In the best of them, Daumier resists his illustrator's sensibility and avoids giving undue emphasis to details of characterization—in other words, he does not rely on specifics of description to carry emotion, but trusts line, tone, touch, and rhythm to carry his meaning. I am advocating neither the icy generalities of the academy nor expressionist abstraction but am simply observing that Daumier's images seem more potent when they don't dissolve into anecdote. Since anecdote is the lifeblood of the satiric caricatures, this difference in emphasis may ultimately be the only thing that truly distinguishes the private from the public Daumier.

The exhibition was accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with entries for each drawing and a series of informative essays by American and German scholars examining the full range of Daumier's work. Various themes—"Lawyers and the Courts," "Sideshows and Saltimbanques," "Don Quixote and Sancho Panza," "The Artist and the Connoisseur"—are thoughtfully discussed, along with more general aspects, such as the relation of Daumier's drawings to his sculpture. The notion that a drawing can communicate ideas without recourse to language seems to come as a surprise to one of the contributors, Margret Stuffmann, who writes about the iconography of Daumier's drawings, but for the most part the catalogue essays are straightforward and perceptive. It's a handsome, useful document that not only adds greatly to our knowledge of Daumier but also offers insight into the period in which he worked.

In the end, however, it is Daumier himself who provides the perfect metaphor for the show in his images of collectors, art lovers, and artists, all shown as they look at art. He frequently skewered the philistine and the pretentious in his published caricatures, but in other, more private versions of the theme of looking at art, such as a sketchy view of visitors to an artist's studio or a large, highly finished watercolor of a single collector studying a single work of art in his art-hung room, he is more gentle and compassionate. In such works, Daumier's art lovers are treated with sympathy and respect, absorbed as they are in contemplation, in the act of looking and reflecting upon what they see. The best of these works are not depictions of an event but meditations on the role of art, on the effect it can have on us, and—finally—on the act of seeing itself. No mean achievement for an "outsider."

Editor's note: Readers are reminded that *The New Criterion* does not publish in July or August. Our next issue will appear in September.

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Who was Wyndham Lewis?

by Victor M. Cassidy

Everyone seems to have heard of Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), but no one is quite sure who he was. He is known—more or less—as an artist, a novelist, a man of controversy, an associate of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and a fascist. He was all these—and more. Lewis is a puzzle, so much so that many find it more expedient to ignore him than to try to make sense of him.

No one did more to create confusion about himself than Wyndham Lewis. His *oeuvre* is huge—and impossibly scattered. He published some forty books: visionary novels, satires, naturalistic novels, a body of short fiction, a book-length poem, art criticism, literary criticism, philosophy, social commentary, political polemics, travel writing, and autobiography. He made roughly one thousand paintings and drawings in styles that range from semi-abstraction to straightforward figuration. In addition to all this, he filled his writings with hundreds of contradictory pronouncements about himself, his beliefs, and his intentions.

In his day, Lewis was widely respected. He is one of the "Men of 1914" who fathered modernism in English literature. Pound, Eliot, and James Joyce were the others. Eliot, who knew Lewis for more than forty years, once declared that he "was the only one among my contemporaries to create a new, an original prose style." Pound, who was Lewis's closest colleague before 1920, wrote that "a man with [Lewis's] kind of intelligence is bound to be always crashing and opposing and breaking. You cannot be intelligent in that way without being prey to the furies."

All true—Lewis had extraordinary gifts and uncommon creative energy. But for every fresh, exciting page of fiction that he wrote, there are ten others which range from mediocre to execrable. He produced wildly uneven criticism—essays which begin with a flourish, slowly fall to pieces, and end without reaching a conclusion. Formidable when on the attack, he was unable to formulate prescriptive views except in a fitful and fragmentary way.

Lewis never fulfilled his promise because he did not know who he was. He spent his life in flight from identity confusion, trying one role after another without ever finding one that seemed to fit. He never quite believed in himself, and he developed self-destructive habits which vitiated much of what was best in his work and made his existence far more complicated than it had to be. Lewis failed because he lacked the will and the self-control that are requisite to success.

Very early in his career, Lewis created a self-defensive "outsider" *persona* and hid behind it. During his early years, when he had done no work to speak of, he cultivated an odd appearance and made a great mystery of himself. As he matured and began to produce work, he created a whole succession of selves.

A fresh *persona* usually emerged when

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Lewis was seriously challenged to expose his work to disinterested critical judgment or to articulate prescriptive views and be held accountable for them. He would abandon the field, transform himself into a new kind of outsider, and start over. Lewis's many reinventions of himself resulted in an *oeuvre* of grand beginnings that lead nowhere. His career was peculiarly episodic.

In 1927, Lewis began to call himself "The Enemy." As he told it, "The Enemy" was a ferociously independent critic who stood ready to strike out at anyone who fell short of his high standards. Forever embattled and on the attack, "The Enemy" loved to explain and justify himself, and to blast away at the foe-of-the-moment.

When he was not at war with the world, "The Enemy" demanded its sympathy. He insisted that he had been persecuted economically and victimized by a press boycott for his vigorous criticism and principled refusal to conform. He declared that he had a special need for financial assistance to get his work done and begged money from anyone who had it. But the record shows that Lewis's books and art received adequate, generally favorable notice. He earned enough from them to live in a modest way, but wasted much through carelessness and bad management.

Since "The Enemy" died a generation ago—and is no longer able to carry out self-serving publicity campaigns—he is largely forgotten today. None of his books is widely read; some have been out of print for decades. No museum outside of Britain has ever held a major exhibition of his art. He has little standing in the academy and is rarely taught.

Some believe that Lewis should not suffer such neglect. Over the past thirty years, many book-length studies and anthologies have appeared. Since 1981, the Black Sparrow Press of Santa Rosa, California, has republished fourteen Lewis books: six novels; two volumes of short fiction; three critical works; a memoir; an essay anthology; and a travel narrative.[1] *BLAST*, the art journal that Lewis edited, is available as a photoreplicate with an introduction. Attractively designed and provided with critical commentaries, annotations, tables of variants, and supplementary materials, the Black Sparrow editions superbly present Lewis's texts. In scope and quality, this series amounts to a variorum Lewis.

To know Lewis, we must first understand his origins. Then we can follow him through the major roles that he played and the key works he produced during each period in his life. His American-born father, Charles Edward Lewis (1843-1918), served courageously with the Union Army during the U.S. Civil War and was decorated in 1865 with a Brevet Captaincy. Returning home to Buffalo, New York, he began to read law, but somehow disgraced himself and was sent traveling by his well-to-do family.

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1 For each book listed below, the first-edition date appears in parentheses, followed by the date of the Black Sparrow edition.
NOVELS: *Tarr* (1918), edited by Paul O'Keeffe, 1990; *The Apes of God* (1930), with an afterword by Paul Edwards, 1981; *Snooty Baronet* (1932), edited by Bernard Lafourcade, 1984; *The Revenge for Love* (1936), edited with an afterword and notes by Reed Way Dasenbrock, 1991; *The Vulgar Streak* (1941), with an afterword and notes by Paul Edwards, 1985; *Self-Condemned* (1954), with an afterword by Rowland Smith, 1983. SHORT FICTION: *The Complete Wild Body* (a reprint of *The Wild Body*, 1927, with supplemental material), edited by Bernard Lafourcade, 1982; *Rotting Hill* (1951), edited with an afterword and notes by Paul Edwards, 1986. CRITICISM: *The Caliph's Design* (1919), edited with an afterword and notes by Paul Edwards, 1986; *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), edited by Reed Way Dasenbrock, 1989; *Men without Art* (1934), edited with an afterword and notes by Seamus Cooney, 1987. MEMOIR: *Rude Assignment* (1950), edited by Toby Foshay, 1984. ANTHOLOGY: *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature & Society 1914-1956*, edited by Paul Edwards, 1989. TRAVEL: *Journey Into Barbary* (a reprint of *Filibusters in Barbary*, 1932, with supplemental material), edited by C. J. Fox, 1983. PERIODICAL: *BLAST 1 & 2* (1914-15; all numbers published), with a foreword by Bradford Morrow, 1981.

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This remittance man was living near London in 1876 when he married Annie Stewart Preckett (1860-1920), the pretty sixteen-year-old daughter of a boarding-house keeper. Soon after their wedding, the couple moved to Canada, where Charles became a traveling salesman. Annie, who had expectations of a comfortable, genteel existence, discovered that her husband was a womanizer and a heavy drinker. The Lewis marriage had been in trouble for some time when (Percy) Wyndham, the only child of Charles and Annie, was born in Amherst, Nova Scotia, on November 18, 1882.

In 1888, the Lewises moved to the Isle of Wight, off England's south coast. Charles spent little time with his wife and child, preferring to travel, hunt, sail, and write essays. In 1893, he ran off with the family maid. He asked Annie for a divorce, but she adamantly refused. Soon, she took her boy and moved into her mother's house near London.

From that day forward, Annie Lewis—married, but without a husband—had no social position and no prospects for romance or remarriage. Restless, unhappy, and untrained for any profession, she mismanaged her finances and let a small inheritance slip through her fingers. Charles eventually ceased hoping for a divorce. He bigamously married his woman companion (they had already started a family) and took her to the United States to live. Now and then, in response to determined pressure from Annie, he would send money for his son. As Annie sank into poverty, she began to take in washing. She would be a laundress for the rest of her life.

Wyndham Lewis showed precocious talents for drawing and writing, but little aptitude for study. From 1896 to 1897, he attended Rugby School, where he failed every subject but art. Reaching the obvious conclusion, Annie sent him in 1898 to the Slade School of Art at the University of London. He distinguished himself there by winning a drawing prize and a scholarship. At some point in 1901, however, the Slade expelled him for poor attendance and insubordination. He was only nineteen years old when his formal education ended.

Keeping London as his base, Lewis traveled often on the Continent between 1903 and 1908, and lived for months at a time in Paris. He worked at his art, but nothing jelled until he saw early Cubist paintings in exhibition. Picasso had an immediate and permanent influence on Lewis's graphic style.

Lewis committed himself to London in 1909. The city was an artistic backwater then, dominated by sentimental academic painting and derivative Impressionism. Lewis, who was the first English painter to acknowledge Cubism, began to exhibit his work in group shows during 1911. In time, he found allies among London's younger artists and became a leader of the avant-garde.

Futurism, an arts movement that celebrated speed, action, and modern technology, had a major influence upon Lewis's painting and his public style. F. T. Marinetti, an Italian poet, founded this movement in 1909. For the next five years, Marinetti and several Futurist artists toured the capitals of Europe, visiting London three times. By applying political-propaganda techniques to the arts, Marinetti got a big press for his movement. He issued outrageous manifestos to stir up controversy, held tumultuous press conferences, and gave entertaining "noise-poem" recitals in music halls. Futurist art explored dynamism in modern life—race cars, riots, city streets filled with traffic, and the like.

Lewis met Marinetti, attended some of his *soirées*, and imitated his publicity techniques ("The Enemy" is a very Marinettian creation). He admired the hardness, energy, and up-to-dateness of Futurist art, but complained that Futurist painters emphasized action at the expense of formal coherence. Also, he saw Marinetti as a threat to his leadership of London's avant-garde.

Late in 1913, Lewis, Ezra Pound, and several young artists began to prepare a review of modern movements in the arts. In the aggressive spirit of Futurism (they were

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all fellow-travelers), they named this journal *BLAST*. ("Blast" was a vulgar expletive in those days.) By May 1914, most of *BLAST* had been set in type. Then, Marinetti brought a big show of Futurist art to London.

At that time, only one English painter, Christopher Nevinson, had unequivocally declared himself to be a Futurist. Hoping to force Lewis and his circle into their camp, Marinetti and Nevinson published a manifesto that implied that the Lewis group was Futurist.

Furious at such presumption—and delighted to quash a noisy foreigner whose publicity successes threatened to swamp them—the Lewis group publicly repudiated Marinetti and heckled him at a lecture. Then, they added new pages to *BLAST*, which announced the birth of Vorticism, a *London-based* arts movement that opposed Futurism. Since it was too late to rewrite and reset all of *BLAST*, the review contains praise for—and violent denunciations of—Futurism.

Vorticist painting sought to marry Cubist formality to Futurist flux. The vortex, which was the symbol of Vorticism (it decorates several pages in *BLAST*), is a clearly defined form that embodies dynamic movement yet has a still center. "At the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated," Lewis told a friend in 1914. "And there at the point of concentration is the Vorticist." This was the closest that he ever came to defining Vorticism.

Lewis's Vorticist art includes semi-abstract depictions of modern metropolitan architecture. His forms are still, yet charged with tremendous energy. Where figures appear, they are semi-abstracted to resemble robots. Lewis uses drab colors so as to avoid any suggestion of Romantic prettiness.

BLAST, which is both a literary and an artistic production, may well be the greatest work of Vorticist art. It is one of the best things that Lewis did, a unique creation of this artist-writer. Quarto-sized, it contains manifestos, fiction, poetry, essays, book reviews, a play, and twenty-three art reproductions.

The manifestos are *BLAST*'s most memorable feature. Written by Lewis in a curious, halting style, they are arranged on the page such that words and phrases seem to leap out at the reader. Here is a sample:

> BLAST First (from politeness) ENGLAND
> CURSE ITS CLIMATE FOR ITS SINS AND
> INFECTIONS
> DISMAL SYMBOL, SET round our bodies,
> of effeminate lout within.
> VICTORIAN VAMPIRE, the LONDON cloud
> sucks
> the TOWN´S heart.
> A 1000 MILE LONG, 2 KILOMETER Deep
> BODY OF WATER even, is pushed against us
> from the Floridas, TO MAKE US MILD.

Such prose, which is simultaneously static and dynamic, fills many pages of *BLAST*. In these manifestos and also in essays, Lewis blasts England, France ("SENTIMENTAL GALLIC GUSH/ SENSATIONALISM/ FUSSINESS"), the British aesthete ("CREAM OF THE SNOBBISH EARTH . . . SNEAK AND SWOT OF THE SCHOOLROOM"), and much else besides.

He blesses England for "ITS SHIPS which switchback on Blue, Green and Red SEAS all around the PINK EARTH-BALL" and thanks the hairdresser "who trims aimless and retrograde growths into CLEAN, ARCHED SHAPES and ANGULAR PLOTS." Votes for women win his approval, as does "the separating, ungregarious BRITISH GRIN."

The blasts and blessings follow a rough overall pattern. Lewis damns Victorian sentimentality, English cultural backwardness, and amateurism in art. He applauds the tough, venturesome sailor, the hairdresser who brings order, and the un-Romantic coolness of Shakespeare and Swift. *BLAST* contains numerous jokes and provocations too. Lewis blesses the Pope to annoy stuffy Anglicans and commends French pornography to outrage prudes. For fun, he blasts cod-liver oil and blesses castor oil.

BLAST's irresistible exuberance can blind a reader to its serious intentions. Lewis's goal was to wake London up and to introduce the modern habit of mind into a city whose artists and art public lagged a full generation

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behind the rest of Europe. *BLAST* introduced a new kind of modern art and a prose that Lewis invented to go with it. For the moment, the editor of *BLAST* was one of the most creative men in Europe.

BLAST was unfortunately timed. Two weeks after it appeared, war broke out and England lost interest in art. Though the Vorticists exhibited together in June 1915 and published a second and final *BLAST* a month later, the public scarcely noticed. Soon, the Vorticists were absorbed into the war effort. Lewis became an artillery officer and fought in the Battle of the Somme. Late in 1917, he was commissioned a "war artist" and was released from combat duty to paint military scenes. He spent much of 1918 in his London studio.

For the next four years, Lewis was primarily an artist. Retreating from Vorticism, he developed a figurative, quasi-Cubistic style. He had three solo shows in London, made gallery contacts in Holland and Berlin, and seemed well on his way toward becoming a prominent painter.

Early in 1922, the big chance came. Léonce Rosenberg, owner-director of the Galerie l'Effort Moderne in Paris, offered Lewis a one-man show. (Sidney Schiff, a friend of both parties, had made the initial contact with Rosenberg, showing him Lewis's drawings.) Rosenberg represented several French modernists including Fernand Léger. A solo show with him would have put Lewis at the center of the international art world, giving his work a stature it had never had before.

Instead of seizing the moment, Lewis waffled, reluctantly agreed to the show, and then sat on his hands. He did not exhibit at the Galerie l'Effort Moderne or in any other Continental gallery. In *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), his memoir of those years, he devotes a few lines to Rosenberg, but does not explain why he never showed with him.

Lewis was afraid to have Paris judge his work. In 1922, he was established in London—a big frog in a very little pond. But if he were to show with Rosenberg, Parisian critics would make no allowances for his English reputation. They would evaluate his work according to international standards. He would be completely exposed.

Lewis was a hasty, careless artist. "I never really finished a painting till six months before the War," he confesses in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, "and then it was not really more than a sketch." Elsewhere in the same volume, he admits: "Before [1920], I had accomplished nothing [in art]—all I had done had a promise, or was, at the most, a spirited sketch or plan. . . ." In 1922, he delivered a commissioned portrait to a buyer in a semi-finished state. "The face, for example, is sketched rather than painted," he stated. "[T]he left hand must in any case at some time be worked on and explained more."

When an artist behaves like this, it is hard to take him seriously. Lewis's failure with Rosenberg was a watershed event that marked the end, for all intents and purposes, of his art career. Though he painted after 1922 and showed in London, he was an artist with a past rather than a future.

Lewis belongs to art history as a forerunner. Vorticism anticipates much that the Russian avant-garde did in the Twenties. But while Lewis barely got started with Vorticism, the Russians fully developed their visual ideas. It was Henry Moore's generation during the Thirties that brought English modernism to international prominence.

Well-read in literature and art, Lewis spoke French fluently, and knew German and Spanish. At some point after the war ended, he began to read political theory, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. His goal was to learn why wars occur and how they can be prevented.

These studies inspired him to begin writing an ambitious critique of postwar society in Europe, which he called *The Man of the World*. Over time, his manuscript grew to several hundred pages; he added in passages of satire and experimental fiction. In May 1924, he submitted *The Man of the World* to a London publisher, who rejected it.

A few months later, Lewis divided *The Man of the World* into parts, which were published as *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926: polit-

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ical theory), *The Lion and the Fox* (1927: a study of Shakespeare and Machiavelli), *Time and Western Man* (1927: literary criticism and philosophy), *The Childermass* (1928: a visionary novel), and *The Apes of God* (1930: a satire). Amounting to almost twenty-two hundred pages of text and incorporating as much serious reading and thinking as many educated people do in a lifetime, these five volumes are a remarkable achievement.

Of the three nonfiction books that came out of *The Man of the World*, *The Art of Being Ruled* is considered the most important. So-named because the author sees most citizens as "puppets" who are controlled by a tiny minority of self-directed people called "natures," *The Art of Being Ruled* is essentially a journal in which Lewis comments upon the books he has read and records his observations of contemporary society.

At some length, he reviews the ideas of five late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century French socialist philosophers: Edouard Berth, François Fourier, Charles Péguy, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Georges Sorel. He traces the influence of scientific and technological thinking upon the public mind and describes the struggle for political power between rich and poor, young and old, and men and women. He reports on society's celebration of the child-mind, traces the changing role of the family, and notes the growing cultural power of homosexuals. Because these issues are very much with us today, *The Art of Being Ruled*, at its best, remains perceptive, prophetic, and very timely.

That's the good news. The bad news is that *The Art of Being Ruled* is no better organized than the average diary. It collects between two covers the speculations of a brilliant man, but it argues no case and reaches no conclusion. Any of the thirteen parts into which it is divided could be excised or moved to a different place in the text without compromising continuity.

The Art of Being Ruled wobbles unpredictably between foolishness and acuteness. In the chapter on the "sex war," for example, Lewis declares that when

> *feminism* first assumed the proportions of a universal movement, it was popularly regarded as . . . directed to the righting of a little series of political wrongs. Woman had been unjustly treated . . . A thousand chivalrous gentlemen leapt to arms and rushed to the assistance of this matron in distress. With great gestures of christian magnanimity, they divested themselves of all traditional masculine authority or masculine advantage of any sort. Tearfully they laid them at the feet of the dishonoured matron, who dried her burning tears, and with a dark glance of withering indignation picked them up and hurried away. The general herd of men smiled with indulgent superiority. So it was all settled; it was a bloodless revolution.

Had Lewis forgotten, the reader wonders, how the suffragettes demonstrated for the vote in prewar London, how they fought with the police, and went to jail? He knew this, of course, for he was personally acquainted with many suffragettes and had praised them in *BLAST*. But in this pointless passage, he simply clowns for the reader.

In the very next paragraph, Lewis declares that feminism "was recognized by the average man as a conflict in which . . . [there] were spectacular 'wrongs' that had, 'in all decency,' to be righted. The issue was put to him, of course, in a one-sided way . . . Ever since it has continued one-sided, in the sense that, although the 'wrong' has been 'righted,' the man is still in the ashamed position of the brutal usurper or tyrant." Here he neatly identifies the "victim" mentality, which is so much a part of our present-day political rhetoric.

Lewis attempted too much in *The Art of Being Ruled*. It is folly to suppose that any man—especially one with no university education—can absorb as much new and challenging material as Lewis did in a few years, think it through, and write an original book about it. Lewis's correspondence suggests that he started out with only the sketchiest sort of plan in mind and proceeded quite haphazardly. He ran out of steam partway through the project and left posterity a first draft instead of a finished book.

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Time and Western Man is the companion volume to *The Art of Being Ruled*. On the final page of this work, Lewis promises soon to publish a book which presents "the particular beliefs that are explicit in my criticism." But no such prescriptive statement appeared. He wrote no more philosophy. Instead, in 1930, he published *The Apes of God*. He had metamorphosed into a satirist.

Set in London just before the General Strike of 1926, *The Apes of God* ridicules wealthy *poseurs* who associate with artists and seek to place themselves on an equal footing with them by making "a little art themselves" (they ape the god-like artists). Such people wish to be taken seriously, says the author, but all they produce is malicious gossip and bad art.

In this *picaresque*, Horace Zagreus, a middle-aged man of shallow intellectual pretensions, takes a moronic young protegé (a "genius," who has written one poem) to visit the Apes of God in their dwellings. The Apes are caricatures of men and women who were active in London literary circles during the early Twenties.

Some of these people (Lytton Strachey, the Sitwells) are still known today. Others (John Rodker, Edgell Rickword) are forgotten writers or (Sidney Schiff) sometime patrons of Lewis. Contemporary readers got some wicked fun from this *roman à clef*. *The Apes of God* became a *succès de scandale* and went into extra printings.

Characters in *The Apes of God* are described from the outside; that is, in terms of their social surfaces. Lewis was later to write that this "classical" narrative method relies upon "the evidence of the *eye* rather than the more emotional organs of sense." Telling from the outside, he would declare, makes good satire. The interior monologue in *Ulysses*—a telling from the *inside*—is no way to depict normal adults, he believed. We are all very much alike inside, subject to similar primitive drives. It is only our surfaces that make us different. *The Apes of God* was Lewis's reply to *Ulysses*, a rival effort.

So far, so good. Lewis began with enough—a promising theme, a large cast of characters, and an innovative approach to narration—to make a lively 250-page satire. He instead produced a grossly bloated, vindictively personal work that few finished at the time of its publication and virtually no one reads today.

Lewis was so determined to outdo *Ulysses* that he made *The Apes of God* 625 pages long. (The first limited edition, a telephone-book-sized tome, weighs five pounds.) To create the requisite bulk, he spun each scene and conversation out to prodigious length, drowning some excellent patches of writing in a torrent of words. He not only lampooned the Apes, but seemed to wish to obliterate them.

So dogmatically does Lewis tell "from the outside" that he never takes the reader past surfaces and never suggests why his characters act as they do. The Apes are the grotesque products of his theory instead of living fictional creations. It is impossible to believe in them, to hate them as much as Lewis does, or to sustain interest in them.

Lewis settles old scores in *The Apes of God* and often places himself at the center of the narrative in a manner that suggests wish-fulfillment. One example of this is the chapter on Sidney Schiff (1868-1944), who was his patron from about 1920 until 1925. An independently wealthy man with interests in the arts, Schiff pseudonymously published semi-autobiographical novels and translated Proust into English. Some admire Schiff's fiction. Lewis disliked it.

Sidney Schiff and his wife, Violet, appear in *The Apes of God* as Lionel and Isabel Kein. In a 79-page scene at the Kein home, Horace Zagreus, as Lewis's surrogate, delivers opinions on the nature of satire and condemns Kein's (i.e., Schiff's) behavior toward Lewis. Zagreus characterizes Kein as a "pseudo-Proust," an "idle . . . pretentious . . . old busybody of a succubus" who feeds on the vitality of artists and bullies them with his money.

During a dinner scene involving many people, Zagreus suggests that Eddie Keith (i.e., Edwin Muir, the Scots poet and critic)

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shamelessly boomed Kein's novels: "Keithie is a journalist, you must know, and develops a great deal of scottish earnestness with traditional facility upon the slightest provocation. He is a 'critic' you must know, too. Now the latest book vamped up by the Old Lionel's foetid dotage, is published: it is in due course dispatched . . . to Keith to review—Li-ing self-portraiture, of course—on this occasion about Li's school-days . . . 'Ha!' says Keith 'a new writer!' So (incredible as that may sound) he discovers old Lionel! Ha ha ha! in the innocence of his heart and thanks to the deep critical insight that distinguishes him—he unearths that Old Li!" This baby-talk narrative fills more than four pages.

Later, Zagreus attacks Isabel Kein, declaring that she has had nineteen facelifts and paraffin injections under her skin. He calls her fat and claims that she gives her husband the material for his novels. Isabel loses her temper, the dinner breaks up, and Zagreus is ejected from the Kein household.

In real life, Sidney Schiff *was* an idle, pretentious bore. He pressed himself socially upon Lewis, writing him endless letters and inviting him to tea and to dinner. He gossiped about Lewis behind his back and even managed to involve a very exasperated Eliot in one of their squabbles.

But if Schiff and the other Apes were so insufferable, why did Lewis spend long hours in their company and attack them with such ferocity five years after that time in his life had ended? He did not have to socialize constantly with these people in order to live. Inheritances from both parents sustained him through the early period of work on *The Man of the World*. He sold art from his studio and through galleries. Pound and Eliot encouraged him to do journalism. He could have found a job of some sort.

The Apes of God is Lewis's revenge upon his father. Its true subject is money and the power it confers upon those who have it. Lewis loathed his father for abandoning him, hurting his mother, and then dominating their household from a distance with his money. He saw his father when he saw the rich, older, and manipulative Sidney Schiff. But this time he could strike back.

The Apes of God is dedicated to Sir Nicholas and Lady Waterhouse, who became Lewis's patrons during the Twenties and contributed to his support for more than thirty years. Sir Nicholas, a wealthy man with no artistic pretensions, declared that Lewis was a great genius and a fine fellow. Correspondence between the two men suggests that they had a parent-and-child relationship. Lewis was the calculating and exasperating, yet lovable boy, while Sir Nicholas played the long-suffering, affectionate, and ever-forgiving father.

An uproar in literary London followed publication of *The Apes of God* in June 1930. As Lewis told it, the victims of his satire were enraged. His life, he claimed cheerily, had been threatened by an airman! He reported that a "certain poetess [presumably Edith Sitwell], who supposed herself an 'ape', had a seizure as she caught sight of Mr. Lewis's advancing sombrero in a Bayswater street, and had to be led into a chemist's shop—where the old-fashioned remedy of Arquebuscade Water was applied with marked success."

To defend his book and capitalize upon the controversy he had created, Lewis issued *Satire and Fiction*, a thirty-two-page "Enemy pamphlet," in September. Here he published congratulatory letters from friends and extracts from many reviews. He told how a laudatory account of his book was rejected by a London newspaper as "too favorable." *Satire and Fiction* concluded with a lively presentation of Lewis's theory of satire—that it must be cool, told from the outside, and free of moralizing (the Apes are not *wicked*, just *dull*).

In 1934, Lewis reworked his essay on satire and republished it in *Men without Art*, a volume which combines new material with several essays that had previously appeared in print. By 1934, Lewis had ceased producing satire. Literary criticism was a major activity.

Men without Art, whose title parodies Hemingway's *Men without Women*, defends literature against "every sort of antagonist" —the moralist, nationalist, Marxist, and

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mystic. It inquires into the "ethical or political status" of serious writing and painting, and argues for their importance. These issues are very much alive today.

The best material in *Men without Art* appears in the first half of the book. It includes the remarks on satire and destructive attacks on Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot. Acknowledging Hemingway's prodigious gifts, Lewis declares that his protagonists are dull, passive individuals to whom things are done and demonstrates that Hemingway's "undistinguished" prose is stylistically indebted to Gertrude Stein.

Lewis calls Faulkner "The Moralist with the Corn-Cob," a Calvinist who wallows in rustic sex and sadism. He provides a devastating account of faked-up atmospherics and contrived melodrama in Faulkner's fiction. Reviewing Virginia Woolf's work, he characterizes her as an old-maidish, peeping prude.

T. S. Eliot gets star billing—and rather ambivalent treatment—in *Men without Art*. Lewis quotes him throughout the book, appraises his work at length, and argues with him. "The Pseudo-Believer," an ambitious essay on Eliot's notions of personality and belief, starts out very well, but collapses about halfway through. Lewis lazily tacks his afterthoughts onto the end of this piece instead of integrating them into the text.

There is an unbecoming touch of envy in Lewis's attitude toward Eliot. His criticism often becomes too personal and sounds like a schoolboy hooting at his teacher. *Men without Art* was published when Lewis and Eliot had been friends for about twenty years. Starting from far behind in career terms, Eliot had completely surpassed Lewis, acquiring an international reputation and wide influence.

Any who doubt that Lewis suffered from identity confusion and egomania should read *Men without Art*. On page 13, he declares "I am a performer;" that is, a creative artist. On page 15, he is the only significant "fictionist deliberately dealing in satire" that he knows of. And on page 179, Lewis is again an "artist." "[T]wo or three, we are a small band," he sighs.

Lewis explains on page 191 that he views political institutions "from the standpoint of genius." On page 216, we learn that "you have in me a person who is as nearly impartial as it is humanly possible to be." But five pages after that, he prefers Roman Catholic belief to Marxism. And on page 226, he has "a much higher opinion of many of the dogmas of Russian Communism than . . . of its spokesmen." Elsewhere he predicts that schoolchildren in a Communist utopia will read passages from his fiction to learn "how repulsive unbridled egotism can be."

Men without Art contains some wonderful howlers. "Anybody who has travelled by train from New York to Boston," Lewis writes on page 123, "or from New York to Washington, will realize . . . that this part of the United States is a sort of desert. The tundra, or the dune, dotted with the eternal fir tree, comes right up to the back door of the last house in almost any Pennsylvanian or New England townlet." Later, Lewis supplies another amazing fact about the United States. "America," he explains on page 211, "is already half-oriental. It is almost as bandit-ridden and corrupt as China. (And now it is going to have the great flocks of beggars apparently, as well, which are such a great feature of the life of the East.)"

Lewis could reason—and express himself—quite cogently when he wanted to. The first half of *Men without Art* especially attests to this. But he did not write in the traditional way. As he focused on a subject, ideas came to him and he committed them to paper. His essays—amusing, digressive, and bursting with inventive energy—are essentially talk in print.

Many who knew Lewis in life have said that he was a wonderful conversationalist. One of these was Cecil Gray, a music critic who joined in late-evening sessions of talk *chez* Lewis during the Thirties. In attendance at various times were Stephen Spender; W. H. Auden; Julian Symons; William Gaunt, the art critic and historian; Constant Lambert, the composer; and others.

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Gray writes in *Musical Chairs* (1948), his autobiography: "I have known many admirable talkers in my time, but I can say without hesitation that Wyndham Lewis was the most brilliant, witty and profound of them all . . . his power of developing a line of thought and returning to it logically, however far afield he might seem to have strayed, was . . . the object of my constant admiration and astonishment." Gray adds that "there was always a complete identity between Lewis the talker and Lewis the writer. In both he was essentially the *improvvisatore* with all the virtues and faults that go with it: the wealth of invention and imagery, coupled with a complete lack of shape or form."

It is the voice of "The Enemy" that we hear in *Men without Art*. We join this rough-and-ready rebel in his lair, where he expatiates to us about art, literature, and the state of the world. Since "The Enemy" is talking the evening away—and we all have drinks in our hands—it *does not really matter* that he meanders, thumps his chest, and goes off half-cocked from time to time. Those who fancy Lewis's distinctive brand of intellectual pyrotechnics *cum* jolly good fellowship—and are willing to live with his faults—should read *Men without Art*. Others can find his best work in anthologies.

As the Thirties progressed, Lewis became an increasingly isolated figure. He had made art and written books for almost three decades, but had precious little to show for years of work. His income was small and his influence limited. Portrait commissions, lectures, and anthology opportunities rarely came his way.

Lewis had brought much of this upon his own head. Notoriously unreliable in professional dealings, he had treated editors and dealers cavalierly, burning many bridges behind him. *The Apes of God* permanently antagonized many acquaintances and put others on their guard.

In addition to this, Lewis was a public supporter of Hitler and Mussolini. He casually endorsed fascism in *The Art of Being Ruled* and published an admiring account of Hitler in 1931. Until his recantation in 1938, he campaigned in print for the fascist cause, producing some dreadful books and articles. During this period, he visited Sir Oswald Mosley from time to time and associated with William Joyce ("Lord Haw-Haw"), the British Nazi. (Joyce was to make English language propaganda broadcasts from Berlin during the war. Afterward, he was tried for treason, convicted, and hanged.)

In his eagerness to prevent a second world war, Lewis misread fascist intentions. There can be no doubt of this. But he supported Hitler and Mussolini far more enthusiastically and far, far longer than common sense or decency should have allowed. Lewis was not an evil man, but an arrogant *naïf* who blundered into politics and made a complete fool of himself.

At any rate, Lewis took stock of his life during the late Thirties and, for the first time in his fiction, directly confronted his feelings about the shabby-genteel household in which he was raised, and the way he dealt with other people. He did this in his two most humane novels: *The Vulgar Streak* (1941) and *Self-Condemned* (1954).

Though he wrote fiction throughout his career and won a degree of *réclame* for his vivid style, Lewis was a cold, dry, and rather cruel novelist. In his luridly misanthropic fictional world, everyone is stupid, human relationships are impossible, and women are calculating sex kittens who drag men down.

The Vulgar Streak breaks sharply with the past. For the first time, Lewis integrates stylistics into his overall authorial design. He presents convincing characters and creates moving scenes. His satire rings true. *The Vulgar Streak* succeeds because it is written from the heart. Lewis was ashamed of the way his mother lived; angry that society so valued "gentlemanly" origins; and bitter because poverty limited him. He came to terms with these feelings by projecting them onto Vincent Penhale, his fictional protagonist.

Penhale, a handsome English actor, has the manners and accent of the upper class, and—it would seem—an independent in-

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come. As *The Vulgar Streak* opens, he is on holiday in Venice during autumn of 1938. He meets and romances April Mallow, a wealthy young woman who is visiting the city with her mother.

As the Mallow affair proceeds, Vincent confesses to his closest male friend that he is not the son of a prosperous solicitor as everyone believes, but the son of a common laborer. He has taught himself how to speak and behave like a gentleman. "In my composition there is a great deal of the actor," he avows. "I am a sham person from head to foot. I feel empty sometimes, as if there were nothing inside me."

When April Mallow becomes pregnant, Vincent marries her and they set up housekeeping in London. His class-masquerade is exposed when the police arrest him as a counterfeiter's associate—that's where his money was coming from—and an accessory to murder. Devastated when Vincent tells all, April miscarries, hemorrhages, and dies. Realizing that his lies have destroyed the woman he loves, and that he soon will go to prison, Vincent hangs himself.

Though Vincent Penhale is a completely fictional character, his circumstances and his response to them parallel Lewis's own. At some point in youth, perhaps while he lived at Rugby School with the sons of Empire, Lewis became mortifyingly aware that he had a disgrace for a father and a mother with a low-class occupation. While he was still in his teens, he developed secretive habits and rigidly compartmentalized his life. No London friend or acquaintance ever met his mother or was told anything about her. He presented himself to the world as a flamboyantly theatrical enigma.

According to the painter William Rothenstein, the eighteen-year-old Lewis "liked to shroud himself in mystery" and to fabulize about his travels and amorous adventures. Augustus John, an artist who saw much of Lewis in Paris, remembered him as "heavily self-conscious." Ford Madox Ford, who published Lewis's first fiction in *The English Review* during 1909, has recorded that Lewis was totally silent during their first meeting. "[E]xtraordinary in appearance," Lewis wore "an immense steeple-crowned hat," a "Russian-looking" coat, and "an ample black cape of the type that villains in transpontine melodrama throw over their shoulders when they say 'Ha-ha!'"

During the *BLAST* period, Lewis was briefly a celebrity who dined with countesses in Mayfair. A few miles away, in a far less fashionable quarter of London, his mother cared for two illegitimate children that he had fathered. As he shuttled between his mother's household and the homes of his wealthy friends, Lewis—like Vincent Penhale—felt like a fraud, wondered who he really was, and feared exposure.

Throughout his career, Lewis systematically concealed his exceedingly messy personal life—five illegitimate children, several bouts of venereal disease, numerous lawsuits, and other scandalous episodes. Even when he married quite respectably in 1930, he hid his wife from visitors and did not introduce her to his London friends until 1946.

For all its importance to Lewis, *The Vulgar Streak* is not a great novel. Numerous, extremely convenient encounters among his fictional characters advance the story, but place great strain upon the reader's ability to believe. The romantic relationship of Vincent and April is developed so sketchily that we are never convinced that he truly loves her. Thus it is difficult to accept her death as a motivation for his suicide. Still, *The Vulgar Streak* is one of Lewis's most truthful, heartfelt works of fiction. He was to do better.

In 1939, Lewis obtained a substantial portrait commission in the United States and sailed there with his wife. He hoped this job would lead to others, and to lectures and articles as well. But little work materialized in the U.S., and when the war broke out, currency restrictions kept him from expatriating funds he had in England. Trapped in North America because he could not pay his return fare, Lewis, who was a British citizen, had to move to Canada when his U.S. visitor's permit expired in November 1940.

For the next two and a half years, Lewis and his wife lived in a dilapidated apart-

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ment-hotel in Toronto. Completely cut off from all that was familiar to him, he desperately sought ways to make a living. Finally, in June 1943, he was hired to deliver two lectures a week at Assumption College, a small Roman Catholic institution in Windsor, Ontario, near Detroit. Later, the Lewises spent about a year in Saint Louis, Missouri. But they both missed England acutely and returned home on the first available ship at the end of the war.

The years in Canada were the worst of Lewis's adult life, but they taught him to value people and made him a better human being. His work improved and he enjoyed unprecedented public recognition. The BBC adapted and broadcast some of his novels and the University of Leeds gave him an honorary doctorate. In 1956, the Tate Gallery mounted a retrospective of his art. Wyndham Lewis died in London on March 3, 1957.

Self-Condemned, the most important book of Lewis's final years, fictionalizes his Canadian experiences. René Harding, the protagonist of this novel, is a prominent British historian and the author of *The Secret History of World War II*, a scholarly best-seller. Harding believes that the academy is hopelessly corrupt, and that he cannot remain there and teach the truth. So he resigns his university chair and sails for Canada with his wife Hester just days before World War II breaks out. The Hardings bring some borrowed funds. René has no serious prospect of employment in Canada.

In the first portion of *Self-Condemned*, René and Hester pay parting visits to his three sisters and their husbands. The reader learns that René is a thoroughly disagreeable man who thinks he has no need of other people. He finds something to sneer at in everyone he meets, and repays kindness with ingratitude and insults. He even resents his susceptibility to his wife's sexual attractions. The only person René likes is his favorite sister. During a conversation with her, he weeps on her shoulder and says that he expects to die in Canada.

The Hardings settle in Momaco, a big city. For three years, they vegetate in the wretched Hotel Blundell while René looks for work. Lewis writes: "Their never-ending disappointments, in the battle to get work —wild efforts to liberate themselves, ghastly repulses—had made of this hotel room . . . a museum of misery. There were drawers packed with letters, each of which once had represented a towering hope of escape. Each effort had resulted in their being thrown back with a bang into this futility."

Memorably, Lewis describes Momaco, the Hotel Blundell, its drunken, concupiscent residents, and the endless Canadian winter. "Icicles six feet long and as thick as a man's arm, hung from the eaves and gutters," he writes. "Below zero temperatures started when the cold came down from Hudson's Bay and higher, and the Polar Sea walked right through the walls of the hotel as if it had been a radio wave . . . At 50 below [the cold] was as impossible to keep . . . out as radium . . . It walked through your heart, it dissolved your kidney, it flashed down your marrow and made an icicle of your coccyx."

Momaco is a hideously provincial place where life is dominated by dour Scots Methodists. René makes an acquaintance or two and earns small sums, but nothing really happens for him until the Hotel Blundell burns down one winter night. The Hardings, who are lucky to escape alive, suddenly become visible in Momaco.

Social contacts multiply and they are welcomed into the expatriate English community. René is invited to write a newspaper column, the Harding finances improve, and they move into a pleasant apartment. The University of Momaco offers René a chair and he starts on a new book. Hester, who has hated Canada since the very first day and desperately longs for England, senses that René is settling in for good. She throws herself in front of a truck. He collapses when he sees her dead body at the police station.

After several months, René recovers to teach at the University of Momaco. But he is not the man that he was before the war: "The

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process of radical revaluation . . . which was responsible for the revolutionary character of his work . . . turned inwards (upon . . . the intimate structure of domestic life), this furious analysis began disintegrating many relationships and attitudes which only an exceptionally creative spirit, under very favourable conditions, can afford to dispense with." But three years of isolation in Canada, the growing conflict between Hester's urgent wish to leave and "the pressure of [René's] own will-to-success, of the most vulgar type," and the shock of Hester's death together destroy René's personality, leaving him "a half-crazed replica of his former self."

None of this is apparent to anyone save René and a close friend. After winning academic distinction in Momaco, René is offered a better position in a leading U.S. university. When he arrives there, the faculty have no idea that "it was a glacial shell of a man who had come to live among them, mainly because they [are] themselves unfilled with anything more than a little academic stuffing."

Lewis undercuts the power of *Self-Condemned* by padding more than fifty pages of it with sophomoric political harangues and discussions. He apparently believed that professors of history win academic renown for writing books which say that all politicians have criminal minds and that the Tories let England drift into World War II to advance their class interests. Despite such flaws, *Self-Condemned* is a very good novel that deserves a wider audience.

Wyndham Lewis had uncommon gifts and immense energy, but he attempted too much, constantly lost control, and left us a jumbled, uneven *oeuvre*. His work cannot possibly justify the extravagant claims that his admirers make for it, but the best that he did has permanent value. By bringing so much Lewis back into print—and doing such an admirable job of it—the Black Sparrow Press has performed a valuable service.

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Three poems by Eugenio Montale
with translations from the Italian by William Arrowsmith

Scendendo qualche volta
gli aridi greppi ormai
divisi dall'umoroso
Autunno che li gonfiava,
non m'era più in cuore la ruota
delle stagioni e il gocciare
del tempo inesorabile;
ma bene il presentimento
di te m'empiva l'anima,
sorpreso nell'ansimare
dell'aria, prima immota,
sulle rocce che orlavano il cammino.
Or, m'avvisavo, la pietra
voleva strapparsi, protesa
a un invisibile abbraccio;
la dura materia sentiva
il prossimo gorgo, e pulsava;
e i ciuffi delle avide canne
dicevano all'acque nascoste,
scrollando, un assentimento.
Tu vastità riscattavi
anche il patire dei sassi:

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pel tuo tripudio era giusta
l'immobilità dei finiti.
Chinavo tra le petraie,
giungevano buffi salmastri
al cuore; era la tesa
del mare un giuoco di anella.
Con questa gioia precipita
dal chiuso vallotto alla spiaggia
la spersa pavoncella.

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At times, climbing down
barren cliffs eroded
now and gorged
with autumn rains,
my heart no longer felt
the rhythm of the circling seasons,
the trickle of relentless time;
but the presentiment of you,
surprised in that heavy breathing
of air, before so still,
among the boulders bordering the path,
filled my soul.
Now, I thought, the very stone
was yearning to be free, to stretch
toward some invisible embrace;
hard matter intuited
the approaching gorge and quivered;
and the tufts of the reeds, eagerly
swaying, spoke assent
to the unseen waters.
O immensity, it was you, redeeming
even the stones in their suffering:
in your jubilation the fixity
of finite things was justified.
I was climbing down the scree.
Brackish winds came gusting
into my heart, the taut sea
was a game of quoits,
all gaiety, the joy
of the vagrant plover
mewed in the valley when she plummets
for the shore.

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Giunge a volte, repente,
un'ora che il tuo cuore disumano
ci spaura e dal nostro si divide.
Dalla mia la tua musica sconcorda,
allora, ed è nemico ogni tuo moto.
In me ripiego, vuoto
di forze, la tua voce pare sorda.
M'affisso nel pietrisco
che verso te digrada
fino alla ripa acclive che ti sovrasta,
franosa, gialla, solcata
da strosce d'acqua piovana.
Mia vita è questo secco pendio,
mezzo non fine, strada aperta a sbocchi
di rigagnoli, lento franamento.
E dessa, ancora, questa pianta
che nasce dalla devastazione
e in faccia ha i colpi del mare ed è sospesa
fra erratiche forze di venti.
Questo pezzo di suolo non erbato
s'è spaccato perché nascesse una margherita.
In lei tìtubo al mare che mi offende,
manca ancora il silenzio nella mia vita.
Guardo la terra che scintilla,
l'aria è tanto serena che s'oscura.
E questa che in me cresce
è forse la rancura
che ogni figliuolo, mare, ha per il padre.

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Suddenly, at times, there comes
a moment when your inhuman heart,
estranged from ours, terrifies.
Then your music clashes with mine,
your every movement is hostile.
I withdraw into myself, drained
of strength, your voice is stifled.
I stare at the stony scree
spilling downhill toward you
to the bluff that slopes above you—
yellow, eroded, rutted
by rain-gouged torrents.
My life is this dry slope—
middle, not end—a road open to converging
runnels, one long, crumbling landslide.
It is this life, again, this flower,
devastation-born,
that dares the sea's hammering, sways
with the wind's capricious gusting.
In this patch of earth devoid of growing things,
a crack widens to let a daisy sprout.
In this flower I tremble toward the sea that lashes me;
silence is still an absence in my life.
I look at the earth, which glitters,
air so still it darkens.
And what grows in me
may be the rancor,
O sea, that every son feels for his father.

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Incontro

Tu non m'abbandonare mia tristezza
sulla strada
che urta il vento forano
co' suoi vortici caldi, e spare; cara
tristezza al soffio che si estenua: e a questo,
sospinta sulla rada
dove l'ultime voci il giorno esala
viaggia una nebbia, alta si flette un'ala
di cormorano.

La foce è allato del torrente, sterile
d'acque, vivo di pietre e di calcine;
ma più foce di umani atti consunti,
d'impallidite vite tramontanti
oltre il confine
che a cerchio ci rinchiude: visi emunti,
mani scarne, cavalli in fila, ruote
stridule: vite no: vegetazioni
dell'altro mare che sovrasta il flutto.

Si va sulla carraia di rappresa
mota senza uno scarto,
simili ad incappati di corteo,
sotto la volta infranta ch'è discesa
quasi a specchio delle vetrine,
in un'aura che avvolge i nostri passi
fitta e uguaglia i sargassi
umani fluttuanti alle cortine
dei bambù mormoranti.

Se mi lasci anche tu, tristezza, solo
presagio vivo in questo nembo, sembra
che attorno mi si effonda
un ronzio qual di sfere quando un'ora
sta per scoccare;

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Encounter

Stay, my sorrow, do not
desert me on this road lashed by eddying
scirocco winds, flailing, then
dying; sorrow, dear
to the dying breeze
on which, lifting over the anchorage
where day now breathes its final voices,
floats a cloud, tilting skyward
a cormorant wing.

Where the river meets the sea, its mouth
is arid waste, alive with limewash and stony rubbish—
but more a sluice for the trash
of human acts, of wan, twilit lives setting
beyond the horizon
whose circle walls us in: emaciated faces,
bony hands, horses filing past, screeching
wheels—not lives, no, but vegetation
of the other sea that straddles this.

We move along a rutted road, caked
mud, grooved, undeviating,
like a hooded cortège crawling
under a weary sky lowering now
almost to window-level, in air
so dense it tangles our steps,
and this human seaweed writhes
and sways in the breeze like curtains
of whispering bamboo.

If you leave me, my sorrow,
sole living portent in this swarm,
a sound seems to diffuse
around me like the chirr of the hands
before the striking of the clock,

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e cado inerte nell'attesa spenta
di chi no sa temere
su questa proda che ha sorpresa l'onda
lenta, che non appare.

Forse riavrò un aspetto: nella luce
radente un moto mi conduce accanto
a una misera fronda che in un vaso
s'alleva s'una porta di osteria.
A lei tendo la mano, e farsi mia
un'altra vita sento, ingombro d'una
forma che mi fu tolta; e quasi anelli
alle dita non foglie mi si attorcono
ma capelli.

Poi più nulla. O sommersa!: tu dispari
qual sei venuta, e nulla so di te.
La tua vita è ancor tua: tra i guizzi rari
dal giorno sparsa già. Prega per me
allora ch'io discenda altro cammino
che una via di città,
nell'aria persa, innanzi al brulichio
dei vivi; ch'io ti senta accanto; ch'io
scenda senza viltà.

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and I slump, unmoving, in the hopeless
wait for someone ignorant of fear
here on this shore surprised by the sluggish
tide—who does not appear.

I may regain a face: in the glancing
light, impulse draws me
to a spindly plant raised
in a pot by a tavern door.
Toward it I reach a hand and feel, fusing
with mine, another life that bears the one form
torn from me; and, like rings
on my fingers, not leaves, but hair
curls around me.

Then nothing more. O drowned presence, you disappear
as you came, and I know nothing of you.
Your life is yours still, dispersed now
in the fitful glintings of day. Pray for me then,
pray that I descend by some other road
than a city street,
in the violet air, against the teeming tide
of the living, that I sense you at my side,
that I go down,
unflinching.

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Art

What there was to see

by Jed Perl

Tibor Csernus

Caravaggio meets de Kooning in the recent paintings of Tibor Csernus, and the results are curious, engaging, brilliant, incoherent, banal. Csernus, who's in his mid-sixties, is better known in Paris (where he moved from his native Hungary in 1964) than he is in New York, but he has had a following here at least since the mid-Eighties, when Joe Shannon put him in his "Representation Abroad" show at the Hirshhorn and the painter Jack Beal published an open letter to Csernus in *Arts Magazine*. The paintings that Csernus exhibited in the Eighties were existentialized Caravaggio: the dramatically gloomy settings were the whole story. Csernus's nudes, spotlit in the deep black nowhere, were downcast nobodies doing nothing much. In the paintings from the past couple of years that Csernus exhibited at Steibel Modern in March and April the palette has lightened up, the brushwork has loosened up, and the compositions are airily intricate. (This is Csernus's way of de Kooningizing Caravaggio.) It's still difficult to say what anybody is doing, but if the subject is the lack of connection between people, then at least Csernus has made it a more interesting subject by gathering together a larger cast of characters who then fail to connect.

Caravaggio rethought High Renaissance figure composition in terms of naturalistic body language. The results were uneven, ranging from the thrilling, alarming immediacy of the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* in Santa Maria del Popolo to the contrived hurly-burly of the *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* in San Luigi dei Francesi. In the seventeenth-century Caravaggio's dramatically lit naturalism may have appeared to have resolved the Renaissance conflict between the real and the ideal. But from our vantage point Caravaggio's view of the New Testament can look as jazzily self-conscious as a method actor's interpretation of Shakespeare. Tibor Csernus obviously admires Caravaggio's strongly modeled forms and startling foreshortenings, but he uses them to such helter-skelter effect, it's apparent that what Csernus really loves in Caravaggio isn't his post-classical coherence but his protomodern incoherence. Csernus may crowd his paintings with figures whose gestures are borrowed directly from Baroque painting, but those gestures advance no narrative, so that even as Csernus is saluting an old idea of figure composition he's undermining (maybe even spoofing) it. Yet the ambiguity of the action in these paintings is what gives them their interest. Here are all these figures gathered in half-ruined spaces that are not quite indoors and not quite outdoors. The paintings are abstractions of narratives; in spite of their being so insistently representational they also strike a viewer as representing nothing.

In the new paintings Csernus's color is in places reminiscent of the overripe color in Italian painting of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Csernus handles those

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passages of slightly lurid pink and yellow and green likably, and the way he manages to shift from detailed modeling to sketchy articulation within a painting and even within a figure makes the paintings fun to look at. In certain respects the paintings resemble the recent Eric Fischls, only the Csernuses have a controlled internal scale and a sense of closure that are way beyond Fischl. Csernus studied at the art academy in Budapest and perhaps he received some solid academic training that has stood him in good stead in later years, as he's pursued his Beckettish view of the Baroque. His paintings are pleasingly virtuosic, and in the strongest ones, which include *Peter's Vigil* and the two versions of *Jericho*, Csernus heaps interaction atop interaction with the panache of a slightly mad eighteenth-century Italian painter of altarpieces. There's a lot to look at. The paintings compose and then decompose before one's eyes. They're rococo-existentialist meditations on the end of narrative. That's their meaning. That's their meaninglessness.

Sharon Duffy

Pass the Photos, *Birthday Party—Singing*, *Cake & Ice Cream*, and *Student-Teacher Conversation* are the titles of four of the paintings that were in Sharon Duffy's show at the First Street Gallery in February and March. The titles describe exactly what the pictures are about. Duffy's smallish paintings generally recount seasonal domestic gatherings—birthdays, holiday dinners—and she captures something of the specialness and the ordinariness of those events. Genre painting, in order to be effective, must be grounded in direct and even intimate experience. Duffy has an intelligent way of isolating moments and situations; she obviously knows these scenes that she's describing. These are vignettes of people, adults and children, meeting in what look to be comfortable suburban surroundings. A viewer is put in mind of Vuillard by the subdued, friendly occasions, as well as by Duffy's habit of presenting the compositions asymmetrically, with informal croppings. Duffy may base some of her paintings on photographs, something that is often the case with Vuillard. If there is a photographic basis to certain of Duffy's works, this could account for a certain disturbing anonymity and disengagement in the drawing. And yet the anonymity of Duffy's figures accomplishes something, too: it gives the scenes their quality of things remembered.

Duffy doesn't bear down on every detail in these scenes. Instead, she puts in the outlines of the figures rather clearly and then fills them with flat color. The color is pleasingly bright, and the way it is applied (Duffy paints on boards rather than canvas) is satisfyingly succinct. The figures aren't quite volumetric; they're seen as overlapping flattish forms—a Cubist idea. There's something invitingly open-ended and something disturbingly unresolved about the many heads that lack faces. The element of abstractness is what Duffy adds to a kind of genre scene that is generally handled with more attention to realistic detail. The ambiguities are what's right about the work. Duffy is painting memories—and it is perhaps inevitable that today, when people are taking so many photographs and videos, their memories are to a considerable degree memories of snapshots. Yet Duffy treasures the vagueness of her recollections much too much. The work isn't all there.

Carroll Dunham

The art students who wear neo-hippie glad rags were in heaven at the Carroll Dunham show at Sonnabend in February and March. There was a lift to their steps, because their clothes matched the paintings and they liked feeling like living art works, with people and paintings sharing the same bright clashing colors, the same warmed-over psychedelic patterns, the same tossed-off juxtapositions. Dunham is deep into his hippie phase, and he's just about the only artist around who can take something as ephemeral as what the twenty-year-olds are wearing and turn it into art. (If Cecil Beaton were alive today he'd be

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photographing the new flower-child outfits in front of Carroll Dunham's paintings.) Of course Dunham is old enough to remember the original psychedelic style. He gives it to us full strength, with the exhilarating quality of silliness and defiance that it had the first time around. Dunham is a dandy: a serious one. His dandyism has saved him from the philistinism of conventional good taste. He has the dandy's way of bringing the authority of high style to the inchoate inventions of the street. Nobody else manages to do this right now. Dunham isn't a great artist, but he's a damn good artist, and his work keeps evolving.

Nonetheless, this show was two thirds no good, the two thirds being the paintings of psychedelic mountain landscapes. These paintings are too flat and too conventionally cartoonish; they look like they were done by Philip Guston on an acid trip. In general in this show the imagery and the paint-handling were fairly close to what Dunham has been doing over the past few years, except that the orifices and protruberances that he likes to paint weren't quite so overtly pornographic. (In this as in much else Dunham is up to date: SoHo has had to rethink its relationship with Washington in light of the presidential election, and censorship and sexuality, while still very hot topics, cannnot any longer unite the art world as they did when Jesse Helms had the administration's ear.) The outlandish colors and bulging forms were constants in this show, only in the best works, which dominated one room, Dunham had attached lots of paint-soaked, color-coordinated Styrofoam balls to his Guston-on-acid canvases. Here—as is so often the case with this artist—it was only when Dunham did something that was really unexpected that he really got going. The improbableness of the Styrofoam woke Dunham up (as the idea of painting on wood veneer got him going in his earlier work). The stranger his ideas, the more amusingly keyed-up his work becomes. The three-dimensional elements add something daring and jarring to the paintings. They make his images less predictable. This is pretty outrageous work for a serious artist to be doing. These paintings are a lot of hooey, but it's hooey that I can look at for a while.

The paintings also show Dunham backing up (amusingly, cleverly) into a kind of work that has in recent years mainly been associated with abstractionists who came up in the Sixties, such as Jules Olitski. The sculpted surfaces that are now favored by some of the Color Field painters have struck many of us as something of a conundrum, because they suggest a kitschy voluptuousness that we hardly would have expected from artists who practice such a severely limited art. (A few years ago, the painter and critic Sidney Tillim published an essay in which he alluded to this paradox, comparing, if I remember correctly, a gold-toned Jules Olitski and a gold-toned Jeff Koons.) Dunham's paintings, with their paint-soaked Styrofoam balls, have a kind of zany post-Cubist dimensionality that recalls the recent work of Olitski; but Dunham, who's unabashed in his fondness for kitsch, can get away with things that a more restrained abstractionist just can't get away with. Olitski stumbles into kitsch; Dunham embraces it. With the result that Dunham's kitsch doesn't look philistine, the way Olitski's does. The paintings with the Styrofoam balls are silly and affected. And they work. They're Carroll Dunham having a ball.

Philip Geiger

John Koch, the Vermeer of Park Avenue, was admired for many years for his paintings of the cocktail hour, with its fading light and expectant emotions. The Kochs are pretty awful paintings, but they're also rather fascinating, because they're emotionally convincing to the precise extent that they're formally unconvincing. It's as if the formal weakness of the paintings—all that dreadful softly finicky rendering of Park Avenue interior decor—lends these scenes an unexpectedly powerful mood of muffled anxiety. I feel a similarly odd fit of form and feeling in some of the work that Philip Geiger exhibits at the Tatistcheff Gallery. (He's another

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painter of civilized meetings between civilized people.) In Geiger's show at Tatistcheff in February there was a wall of interiors, paintings of people visiting or relaxing or looking at paintings. The interiors—an artist's studio and a kitchen and what looks like a living room—are white and airy. The color in these paintings is a mixture of tans and grays and whites that I can only think to describe as ornery. It's mediocre color from a formal point of view—it's repetitive and it doesn't really give one's eye much to look at. But as an evocation of an even, slightly dull emotional tone it does have its effect. Geiger uses a choppy brushwork that lends these paintings an overall animation. The color and the brushwork do something: they wash over the figures in waves of moodiness. Exactly what attitude Geiger takes toward these figures is difficult to determine. Sometimes he seems to be sentimentalizing them, at other times his attitude could be ironic or even comic; perhaps he doesn't always know his own mind. Yet there's something going on here. Geiger paints itchy boredom, nervous-making interactions.

Leon Goldin

In Leon Goldin's drawings natural forms are drastically transformed but they are not diminished. That's difficult to do. Goldin focuses on a fragment of a landscape—an interweave of branches, a group of tree trunks—and he extracts something from it that's both tenuous and definite, fluttery and steely. This artist is a true believer in the old-time religion of modern art, by which I mean that he finds abstraction revealed within nature. Cézanne is the religion's Moses, Mont Sainte-Victoire is its Mount Sinai. It's a religion that few people any longer believe in and even fewer any longer make believable art out of, but Goldin does it. I've seen Leon Goldin's shows for more than twenty years now, and this exhibition of drawings at the Kraushaar Gallery in March was the best he's ever had—a remarkable event.

The drawings are in charcoal. The charcoal lines—which seem to be arrived at through a process of drawing, erasure, and redrawing—feel as if they're lodged deep in the paper. The lines are muffled yet weighty. Many of the drawings also include rather opaque color, done in pastel. The planes of color are muted, rich, bold, and they fit into the charcoal lines like panes of stained glass fit into the leading of a Gothic window. Goldin is obviously looking very closely at things—he's inside the scenes that he draws—and the slightly fuzzy edges of his lines and the haze of charcoal erasures that sometimes covers the paper add to the quality of intimate, out-of-focus optical experience. There's a good deal of variety in these drawings; some hold close to nature, in others it's hard to recognize specific things. These are landscapes in which one can rarely make out horizon lines or skies. At times the forms get a little too obscure. I feel that certain rounded shapes must have a personal meaning for Goldin that he has failed to convey to his viewers. And in general the compositions that go from end to end are more successful than the ones that float in the middle of the page. But all in all the variety is a good thing: it brings the viewer along on the adventures that the artist is having as he observes and responds.

Because this kind of gravely abstracted work, with its Cubist underpinnings, is rather less common today than it was thirty or forty years ago, there is a danger that Goldin's work will be misunderstood as expressing a nostalgia for the semiabstraction of decades past. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Abstracting from nature is simply what Goldin does; he's been doing it for decades, but I don't think he's ever done it with the simple authority he achieves in these drawings. In his paintings Goldin often miscalculates his effects. The scumblings and delicate brushstrokes and thicker and thinner areas of paint don't register from a distance in the way that Goldin probably intends; he doesn't seem to know what a person sees when he looks at the surface of a painting. But in these drawings, which are all less than three feet wide or high, every effect is perfectly calculated to draw us in. Once we're in, we realize what a shiver of excitement runs

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just beneath the surface of the work. Several memorable drawings are of a small hill with, at its top, a stand of trees. It's a motif that goes way, way back, beyond Cézanne and Courbet to Giorgione. In Goldin's hands the vignette has a summary power. The evocation of place and space is so abbreviated, it's almost heartbreaking. Goldin's drawings are tough but elegiac. The planes of color are like fragments of stained glass seen in fading light.

Chris Macdonald

Chris Macdonald's big sculptures of trucks, cars, and machines, constructed of two-by-fours and nuts and bolts, are delightfully direct. So are the teensy trucks and "space vehicles," made from materials from the hardware store and the street, that he exhibited at Baron/Boisanté in February and March. In these small works, Macdonald continues the one-plus-one-equals-two guilelessness of his work with nuts and bolts, but by other means. Many of the sculptures are made of bits of wire mesh that have been woven with brightly colored plastic strips. It's an unlikely medium, yet Macdonald handles it with a winning ingenuity.

Nearly four dozen odd, brightly-colored constructions were arranged on a big made-by-Macdonald plywood table at Baron/Boisanté. I would not have known, except by consulting a key provided by the gallery, that each of these miniature sculptures is Macdonald's version of a particular truck or piece of machinery. (Macdonald's big wood pieces have similarly specific derivations.) There is something childlike in these connections to particular machines; they're linkages that Macdonald must realize most gallerygoers won't get, so there's something secretive about the associations. But the specifics aren't important; what's important is that we get the general idea that there's a specificity to these objects, that we catch their detail, their individuality. That's what's such fun. Of course this work recalls Calder, but the connection is not so much a matter of formal influences (though there may be those) as it is a connection in practice, Macdonald having some of the genial engineer-run-amok panache that made Calder such a beloved figure. Macdonald's show of teensy things fit beautifully into the shoebox-sized Baron/Boisanté. There's a synergy between the quirkiness of the space and the quirkiness of the sculpture. Chris Macdonald is still the boy-man in love with toy trucks.

James McGarrell

James McGarrell had a wonderful idea for a show: a series of paintings based on fantastical meetings between various eminent figures in the arts and their younger selves. The work that was at Frumkin/Adams in February included paintings of Elizabeth Bishop, Vladimir Nabokov, Charles Chaplin, Orson Welles, James Joyce, Billie Holiday, Edwin Dickinson, Cole Porter, and Ezra Pound. They're all wonderful choices. In some of the paintings there is a direct interaction between older and younger self. The two Nabokovs sit down and play chess; the tired old Welles is filmed by the young genius. But in many of the paintings there's no interaction: the two figures are merely disposed in a fantastical landscape, and they don't even necessarily seem conscious of their opposite numbers. McGarrell isn't much of a figure painter, so he can't highlight the physical differences between his younger and older artists, yet he does get a mood going in the romantic-fantastical mindscapes that he designs for his protagonists. The paintings are big (eighty inches high) and the extreme warmth of the color (lots of high-keyed oranges, reds, and purples) and the generally crowded character of the compositions heighten a viewer's expectations. McGarrell overlaps textures and colors so that there is a curious quality of layered scenery, as if one is seeing a landscape in a process of transmogrification or deterioration, with vistas peeling away to expose other views. This is probably meant to suggest the passage of time, and as one looks closely at the paintings one hopes to find lots of nuggets of narrative embedded in these

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complicated surfaces—one hopes to find the kind of intellectual-biographical fantasy that the theme suggests. But McGarrell's invention isn't nearly up to his themes. Ezra Pound is (according to a catalogue published for a show of the paintings at Dartmouth) "poised between the Idaho of his birth, and the island of San Michele (where Stravinsky is also buried)." But what about the life? What about London, Paris, Vorticism, Gaudier-Brzeska, Fascism, Saint Elizabeths? McGarrell has a curiously depopulated view of the immensely rich lives of these men and women. How can he imagine weaving a memory painting around Nabokov without including his supremely visual recollections of Russia, contained in *Speak, Memory*? Or the upstate New York college town of *Pnin*? Or the Fifties Western Americana of *Lolita*?

Joan Mitchell

Joan Mitchell died last October, and this spring there were two shows devoted to her work. The Robert Miller Gallery exhibited some of her last paintings, while Susan Sheehan, some floors up in the Fuller Building at 41 East Fifty-seventh Street, had a retrospective of prints and illustrated books. Mitchell did some very fine lithographs, but in a way the most interesting thing in the Sheehan show was not a print but a group of three drawings from 1975 on which Mitchell had typed poems by her friend James Schuyler and then illustrated them in pastel. Mitchell's pastels present remarkably attentive readings of Schuyler's poems; these pastels look somewhat like the more abstract of the Turner watercolors (and it's worth recalling that Turner was another painter who was attuned to the work of poets). Done two decades after Mitchell first made her mark in Manhattan, these drawings, a union of artist and poet, recall the years when all the artists and poets came to the big intoxicating city and learned a thing or two about the natural world. But where, amidst the late nights and hungover mornings of Manhattan, did they manage to learn *that*? In part from their excursions to Long Island and New England, in part from the books they read and the paintings they looked at. The unnaturalness of Manhattan set the natural world in high relief, so that these city sophisticates could see the changing light and weather and seasons very clearly and get it all down with a spontaneous, surprising touch.

Mitchell's is an art of glimpses and quick, intense apprehensions. This is the work of an artist who has a very solid idea of what she can and can't do. While the shows were up on Fifty-seventh Street a documentary about Mitchell, directed by Marion Cajori, was at the Film Forum on West Houston Street. Here, in response to a question, Mitchell explained that she was not an intellectual, and then went off into peals of laughter, the laughter being, I surmise, because she knew that she was in her carefully maintained intuitiveness more of an intellectual than most of the intellectuals that she knew. The impression left by the interviews in the film was of an incredibly smart artist (but then I've never met a good artist who wasn't a smart artist). To a question about what happened to her when she painted, obviously meant to elicit something metaphysical, she thought for a minute and then said something like, "My hands get dirty." More peals of laughter.

The memorial show at Robert Miller was uneven, certainly not overall as much of a success as the Mitchell show at the gallery in 1989. Somebody was trying too hard to shape the work into a final statement. (Maybe the gallery was just fulfilling Mitchell's wishes.) The large room held three paintings that wanted to be major but weren't even any good. *Ici*, the big colorful painting, was overcrowded and congested. The other two in the room were awfully empty, as if lots of bare canvas and a few darkish shapes were a way to paint a painting about leave-taking.

The show included one composition, the big untitled yellow diptych, that is as good as anything Joan Mitchell ever did. Here, the two panels contain roughly similar concentrations of yellow paint, interspersed with strands of brilliant green and deep purple. The panels construct a dialogue full of mirrorings, doublings, echoes, sharp distinc-

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tions. This painting is about similarity and difference, unlikeness within likeness. These are not new themes in Mitchell's work, except that one of her old themes, that of here-versus-there, is suddenly something more like before-and-after or even life-against-death. Mitchell has earned the metaphysical overtones.

She was an extraordinary painter. She began with the ideas of de Kooning and Pollock and Kline and went on from there. She's certainly a better painter than Kline; as time goes on more and more people may wonder about how de Kooning and Pollock compare to *her*. She was not as innovative as they were, but she died at a time when innovation seems an overrated idea. Her relation to first-generation Abstract Expressionism is original and daring. Her Abstract Expressionist paintings carry on from the all-over canvases of Pollock and de Kooning in something like the way that the still lifes of Morandi carry on from the Cubism of Braque and Picasso. When she died she was painting in top form, certainly as well as she had since the mid-Fifties. Robert Miller, the most elegant gallery in New York City, has produced a catalogue bound in canary-yellow cloth, and that yellow, like the yellow in her last great diptych, is celebratory. John Ashbery, a friend of Mitchell's since the Fifties, has produced one of his beautiful now-all-too-rare prose pieces. It begins at the beginning. "I happened to see Joan Mitchell's first show, at a gallery called the New Gallery, in 1952. I was new to New York and the painting of New York was new to me." If an artist has to go, this is the way to go, with the paintings hanging at the Robert Miller Gallery and John Ashbery on hand to say a few words.

Naomi Nemtzow

Naomi Nemtzow paints quiet Brooklyn streets. Not the charming Brown Decades blocks of Brooklyn Heights but the neighborhoods where there's nothing much except the asphalt playgrounds and parked cars and the endless (endless!) flat red-brick façades. Her subject is plainness, but she describes these undistinguished streets with such delicate authority that she holds a viewer's attention. A few of the cityscapes in her show at the Bowery Gallery in April were remarkable, with their beautifully modulated grays and greens and tans and their easy, unprepossessing brushwork. She gives the spindly trees that sprout out of the sidewalks a bit of feathery poetry—she loves them the way Corot might love them. The best of these intimate appealing street scenes recall Utrillo; not the later touristy Utrillo of the Moulin de la Galette but the early Utrillo who thought of Montmartre as a peaceful backwater. Has Nemtzow looked at Utrillo's Montmartre and seen her Brooklyn? Make no mistake: this kind of unemphatic painterly painting is wickedly hard to do well. There was also a small, touching painting of a crowded kitchen in the show, but a lot of the work seemed rather lazy, and the many figures without faces were a little hard to understand, given that one of the few figures with a face was amazingly accomplished, as good as many a Derain. The high points left me wondering what, the rest of the time, was holding Nemtzow back.

Carl Plansky

A year ago, Carl Plansky had his first solo show, at 55 Mercer. He was forty years old. The paintings were good, and he got some attention. A year later he had a second show at 55 Mercer (in February), and the paintings were not so good. This isn't in and of itself a big deal—they could get better next time around—but I think it's important for those of us who expressed interest to voice our reservations. Just now there's too much silence surrounding serious painting. It's not enough to commend painters because they paint; there must be some discussion that tells painters that we expect them to go farther and paint better. Plansky's abstract landscapes, with their thick paint and rapidly worked surfaces, are all feeling. The artist puts something down, reacts to it, reacts to his reaction, and things get more or less

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representational as he goes along. A year ago the paintings were a mixture of fast and slow passages and thick and thin paint; they had some depth. There was one painting in this show, *Malus and Maple*, that held me with its bold design, its ambiguous forest coloring. But beyond that the work felt sloppy and out of focus. The color, which was deep and resonant a year ago, was tinny and artificial-feeling this time around. The complicated ambiguity of Plansky's surfaces was missing, and that's mostly what he has going for him. I don't know when these paintings were done in relation to the earlier batch, but they felt like they'd been done in haste. With the exception of *Malus and Maple*, the surfaces didn't have that mysterious breathing quality that I remember from the first show.

Paul Resika

Paul Resika fills small landscape paintings with operatic emotion. He gives us a rush with his full-strength colors, and though the details tend to get lost in the incandescence, the work is specific enough to make us aware that we're seeing New England or Mexico or—in some of the recent paintings in his show at Salander-O'Reilly in February—Provence. Perhaps it is not that the places retain their individuality, so much as that the paintings retain the individuality of the emotions that Resika has felt in those places. These small paintings have the lovely blurred quality of some of Edwin Dickinson's landscapes—they're Edwin Dickinsons done in near-Day-glo and, astonishingly, they succeed.

The small paintings are the Resikas I admire. Resika, however, may be ambivalent about them. At least he doesn't seem to have prized them as much in recent years, when he has allowed his shows to be dominated by larger and larger canvases. In his five- or six-foot canvases he does the same things that he does on the small formats, but the enlargement of the elements has a dampening effect. Resika's abbreviated kind of landscape painting simply isn't kept under enough pressure when it's done on big formats. There may be another factor at work as well. If the small paintings are done from life, the larger ones in the studio, then Resika is having trouble sustaining a landscape mood indoors. But whatever the procedural issues are, the fact is that Resika has pushed simplification too far in these big paintings. He's the least simple-minded of artists, but some of the large Provincetown pier paintings that he's been showing in recent years look simpleminded. Those big uninflected planes of sky and water are Resika's undoing. In the nineteenth century, water was an exciting thing to paint. Turner and Courbet and Monet wanted to get a flatter look into their landscape paintings, and water, with its absence of perspectival indicators, turned out to lead the way into abstraction. But by now the idea that expanses of water are protoabstract structures is overly obvious, and Resika can't really find anything new in the idea. In his big paintings the abstract thinking that underlies his work shows overly much, with the result that Resika's work looks almost naïve. That's bizarre, because in the small paintings he remains an immensely sophisticated artist, an artist whose sophistication doesn't get in the way of his spontaneity.

The small new paintings of Provence, with their iconic tile roofs and green-green trees, may be the best things he's ever done. It's very hard to do paintings this casual and this exact. The subject, sunlight in Provence, is a cliché, but Resika handles it with a startling, renewing sensuality. He gets what you remember about the sunny South—the heat on the roofs, the cool of the shadows, the tomatoes that will burst open in the garden if they're not, quickly, quickly, picked for lunch.

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Theater

The trouble with "Angels"

by Donald Lyons

The name of the thing is *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* and that ain't the half of it. What is now at the Walter Kerr Theatre is only the *first* three and a half hours; a further three and a half hours, called *Perestroika*, will arrive in the fall. It is the brainchild of Tony Kushner, whose earlier play, *A Bright Room Called Day*, was an explicit and loud attempt to equate Reagan's America with Hitler's Germany. So one kind of knows what to expect from this cumbrously titled opus. It has been hailed with a rapture unheard in decades. It got the Pulitzer. "The finest drama of our time," said *The New York Observer*, "It asks: Where is God? And yearns for an answer, a prophet, a messiah, or salvation. It is, in its searing essentials, about love." Golly. This language might be thought excessive for the *Oresteia*. Cleverer in expression but no less smitten was Frank Rich of the *Times*, who spoke of "the most thrilling American play in years."

As will perhaps become clear, the huzzas occasioned by *Angels* are not really about this slender, derivative, and vulgar play; they are rather victory chants in celebration of the takeover of a culture. But first, the play. It is directed by George C. Wolfe, new head of the New York Shakespeare Festival, where *Angels* was scheduled to open until Mr. Kushner thought better of that arrangement (surely not, however, out of Eighties, Reaganite greed) and took it to more lucrative pastures uptown. Mr. Wolfe is the ideal director for a weak script like this: he knows how to keep things moving, how to milk every laugh, how to dramatize every beat. Set in 1985 and 1986, the story centers on the parallel dissolution of two couples: a yuppie Mormon lawyer and his wife; a Jewish clerk and his lover. The Mormon couple is torn asunder by the husband's growing inability to stop cruising parks for men at night and by the wife's consequent paranoia, loneliness, and pill-popping. By the end of *Millennium*, the husband has still not quite accepted his gaiety but is doing mucho handholding in bushes. The wife is having hallucinations in which she is transported to Kingdoms of Ice by unorthodox travel agents. This narrative seems unable to settle on an attitude toward the wife: it is, of course, the hubby's duty to embrace his homosexual impulses and thus to wound this woman; it is her duty to suffer, and suffer is about all she does here. The atmosphere is drearily reminiscent of 1950s melodramas of repressed longings à la *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Maybe, of course, the wife will get a lesbian mate in *Perestroika*; it seems the only solution in Kushnerland.

One half of the other couple is a Woody Allen whiner and would-be epigrammatist given to utterances like "Catholics believe in forgiveness, Jews believe in guilt" and "You're nice, I can't believe you voted for Reagan" and "Jeane Kirkpatrick, what does the word freedom mean when she talks about it?" And this guy is the most articulate

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and cutting spokesman for Kushner's political wit. His lover, a man called Prior Walter, contracts AIDS and declines throughout the play, dying at the moment of the close. Funny, flamboyant, campy, Prior is at least a character within Kushner's creative range. As played by Stephen Spinella, he owes a lot to the bravura style of Charles Ludlum's Theater of the Ridiculous and similar companies. In his illness, Prior is deserted by the politically correct lover and is left to suffer alone. These scenes of pathos, in and out of hospital rooms, are affecting, but their affectingness is more a function of the horror they are signifying than of any special power in Kushner's writing.

The character of Prior is called on to do more than to die bravely and merrily. He must somehow intimate the coming of "another America of truth and beauty" (in Frank Rich's words) or indeed the coming of a messiah of some kind. Of *what* kind we cannot guess, for Kushner's toying with religious imagery and rhetoric is both frivolous and (since he is an admitted Marxist) insincere. *Perestroika* will doubtless offer details of the redemptive scenario (have I read or did I dream that Gorby and Prior join hands to redeem everybody?).

But we get a glimpse of things to come in a huge kitsch angel that hovers over Prior at the finale proclaiming, "the great work begins, the messenger has arrived." "Very Steven Spielberg," quips the moribund but ever-sharp Prior at the sight of this tacky apparition, in allusion to the descent of the spaceship in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. He might better have said, "Very Andrew Lloyd Webber" or "Very Cameron Mackintosh," for this campy angel is really the bastard child of the saucer in *Cats* or the chandelier in *Phantom* or the helicopter in *Miss Saigon*. It is only the glitzy imagery of a degenerate Rialto that Kushner is able to wield when attempting to convey his notion of spiritual beauty or significance.

But, if Kushner's gestures toward utopia and love are singularly unconvincing, he *is* able to hate. Roy Cohn figures as the all-purpose villain in *Angels*, trying to convince the Mormon lawyer to join the Meese Justice Department, sophistically redefining homosexuality and AIDS so as to exclude himself (the best of this stuff is cribbed right from various biographies), being forced to accept succor at the moment of death from the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg (whose death sentence he had declared his proudest achievement). Despite Ron Liebman's Volpone-like energy in the role, the Cohn character becomes in fact less interesting and less coherent as it goes along; his first appearance —a virtually unideological manipulation of power and influence on simultaneous phone lines—is his best. Like Prior—but in an antithetical sense—Cohn is loaded with too much symbolic weight by the clumsy dramaturgy of Kushner; he must be McCarthyism, closetedness, Reaganism, conservatism, and ultimately meanness and not-niceness in general. (Mr. Kushner has said that "progressive people, in my opinion, are deeper and more sensitive than people on the right.") Frank Rich, employing an unsavory locution, dubbed this Cohn "an Antichrist" and also spoke of this Cohn's "shamelessness worthy of history's most indelible monsters." Roy Cohn was an unlovely character, but this is hysterically and tendentiously disproportionate language to use about him in a time that witnessed Hitler and Stalin (Ethel Rosenberg's master).

The fineness of Mr. Kushner's moral judgment may be best gauged neither by his handling of the dead Cohn nor even by his refusal to distinguish between Cohn and Jeane Kirkpatrick but by his solicitation of a nasty and homophobic laugh from the complaisant Broadway audience at the expense of President Reagan's son. In a word, Tony Kushner is someone no wise person would choose as a guide to utopia. His agenda is brutally and artlessly familiar: to indict conservative governments of the United States for the sins of anti-Communism and (don't ask how, please) responsibility for AIDS.

And there is, as many commentators have noted, a new glow of triumphalism around *Angels* since the Democratic election victory. The play is seen as the very voice of the New

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Age. And in its ludicrous pretensions to greatness that barely mask a corrupt cynicism and a smug didacticism, it does seems exquisitely Clintonian to me. Come to think of it, that descending female angel may have a health-care scheme tucked up her wing.

The Royal Dramatic Theater of Sweden's production of Ibsen's poetic masterpiece *Peer Gynt*, staged by Ingmar Bergman, was imported to BAM for a brief run. This long work is famous for wide-flung meditations on life's meaning, and one vaguely expected heavy Nordic breathing and brooding. But, with the audacity and surprise of supreme genius, Bergman drew forth from *Peer Gynt* a satyrlike coarseness and tough ribaldry. The first part, "Tales and Dreams," set high in Peer's native mountains, was populated by hostile neighbors doing savage wedding dances in angry-red costumes and wooden clogs and by lasciviously welcoming trolls sporting tails. Amid these trolls, who are Peer's permissive fantasies, he rides a pig, wears a phallos—in short, runs the gamut of male irresponsibility. In counterpoint to this is Peer's rough and funny but immensely moving relationship with his mother, Ase. The magnificent Börje Ahlstedt played Peer as an oafish everyman out of Aristophanes and Beckett and Keaton—or rather he found all this in Ibsen. The sublime Bibi Andersson brought a Mother Courage hardness to Ase. In the second part, "A Foreign Land," Bergman gave us exotic kingdoms marked by calculating sensuality and madness in fierce, geometrical white. A Rubenesque temptress, Anitra, rolled about, legs up, in orange, but the dominant shade was the White of Self-Interest. In the third part, "The Return Home," a terrific sea storm deposits Peer on the shore of a long examination of conscience. A Button Molder who echoes Mozart's Commendatore vies for Peer's soul with a loving madonna-figure who cradles the sinner in a *pietà* pose. Bergman, one of this century's great artistic thinkers about Eros and Thanatos and God, has displayed a wonderful array of visual and spiritual *Gestalts* in realizing the nineteenth century's greatest play. To be nourished by the likes of *Peer Gynt* after junk *Angels* food is to despair of America's diet.

The spirit of Thornton Wilder, miniaturist, expressionist, experimentalist, sentimentalist, remains elusive after all these years. The recent revival of three short Wilder plays—"The Long Christmas Dinner," "The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden," and "Pullman Car Hiawatha"—by the Willow Cabin company at the Circle in the Square Theatre helps to clarify the artist's case. These three plays, performed here under the title *Wilder, Wilder, Wilder*, were published in 1931, together with three slighter efforts, as *The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act*. *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) still lay ahead.

"The Long Christmas Dinner" takes the Bayard family through ninety years of Christmas dinners. The setup is expressionist: the family sits in chairs and mimes eating whilst its elderly (or a boy off to World War I or a still-born baby) shuffle out through a gate of death and babies are brought in by a nurse in starched white through a gate of life. The commonplaces of familial discourse—weather, health, food, the day's sermon, neighbors—recur in generation after generation. But father quarrels with son, children leave, the family disintegrates, and at last a spinster cousin is left alone in possession of the house. A family has run its lifespan. "The Long Christmas Dinner" has a place in a tradition of American writing that includes *The Magnificent Ambersons* by Booth Tarkington, *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson, and *One of Ours* by Willa Cather—chronicles of change, decay, joy, and sorrow in the heartland of the country in the early decades of this century. This little play has not the stature or wisdom of such works, but neither is it meretricious or false. It gets, too, a fine, brisk production under the direction of Willow Cabin head Edward Berkeley, who alertly avoids sentimentality. Wilder's mild enough expressionism is further accentuated in Miguel Lopez-Castillo's set, which dispenses with tables and turkeys

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and wigs, as well as with Wilder's prescribed "black velvet" and "garlands of fruits and flowers" around the twin portals, and which adds a sort of heavenly loft where the deceased climb to sit. This production makes, indeed, the most comfortable, sensible, and imaginative use I've seen of the awkward oval thrust of the Circle stage.

In the second play, the Kirby family of four—mother, father, son, daughter—are in a Chevrolet driving from Newark to Camden to visit a married daughter who has, we eventually discover, just given birth to a stillborn baby. The play is without scenery and features a Stage Manager, who reads from a script the lines of minor characters "with little attempt at characterization, scarcely troubling himself to alter his voice, even when he responds in the person of a child or a woman." "Happy Journey" belongs to the mother, superbly played by Maria Radman: a fussy chatterbox bursting with banal commonplaces, quick to take offense and quick to forgive, a finally delightful presence, the very incarnation of bourgeois American motherhood. Her moral landscape is unapologetically simple: "I guess I can take my children out of school for one day without having to hide down back streets about it"; "The world's full of nice people"; "I'm glad I was born in New Jersey. I've always said it was the best state in the Union. Every state has something no other state has got"; "If people aren't nice I don't care how rich they are. I live in the best street in the world because my husband and children live there." The kids read billboards and ask for everything on them; the father quietly drives; they pause for a funeral; they get hot dogs; they sing songs. It is, despite the sad occasion for the trip, a picture of a reasonably happy family in a country where happiness is possible. The overall effect is a successful elevation of the Jersey quotidian that has affinities with the work of another Jersey lyricist, William Carlos Williams, and that recalled to me those mysterious lines that end Rilke's Tenth Duino Elegy:

> And we, who have always thought
> of happiness as *rising*, would feel
> the emotion that almost overwhelms us
> whenever a happy thing *falls*.
> (*trans. Stephen Mitchell*)

The third play, "Pullman Car Hiawatha," takes a random assembly of passengers on the New York-Chicago night train run on December 21, 1930. There are two organizing personalities present: a stage manager again and a porter. The actors bring in their own chairs to simulate the car. Of the dramas among the passengers, the gravest is the death of a young married woman, Harriet. As the train glides through the night, various symbolic personages address us briefly: the town of Grover's Corners, Ohio; a field; a tramp ("I have a right to be in this play"); a German railway worker killed long ago in the building of the track; a watchman; a mechanic. Above this, a cosmological parade of pretty hours and planets sashays on the loft space above. This is perhaps Wilder in a facetious vein, neither serious enough nor quite light enough. But at the end the dead woman has a long, valedictory monologue that suddenly swoops us, as Wilder's lyrical theater at its best can, into the heart of America. "Goodbye," she sighs, "Emerson Grammar School on the corner of Forbush Avenue and Wherry Street."

Premonitions, formal and thematic, of *Our Town* occur in the first and third of these plays; premonitions of *The Skin of Our Teeth* can be found in the second. But the value of the shorter works is far from just that of pointing to later accomplishment. Indeed, it could almost be said that, in their gracility of shape and lightness of emphasis, they are superior to the full-length plays to come. While sounding chords dear to Wilder—American rectitude, American sadness, the evanescence of things—they largely avoid that heavy eschatological sentimentalizing he was to fall into. In them we can see Wilder's theatrical talent at its purest and sweetest and least strained.

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The media

Shadows & fog

by James Bowman

It is one of those tiresome truths, taught you at your mother's knee, that you really ought to try harder to be a Good Listener. Most people, the assumption was when I was growing up, wanted to talk all the time, and a Good Listener was the rare and worthy fellow who restrained this impulse for the sake of others. Therefore it always seemed to me a quirk of my own that I liked listening better than talking, and for years I would congratulate myself on this evidence of my congenital moral superiority. Whatever else you could say about me, at least I was a Good Listener.

I now think that this must have been a more common feeling than I knew among those of us who grew up as the first television generation. The age of the couch potato has been ushered in by the demographic bulge of those whose watching and listening skills were if anything too finely honed. For the virtues of our passivity seem to me now to have reached a natural limit much more quickly than I would ever have thought possible when I imagined that there was no such thing as listening too well, or too much.The therapeutic culture, however, which has now so far infiltrated the media culture as to be almost indistinguishable from it, continues to thrive upon the illusion that listening is good in and of itself, independent of the truth or falsity, the sense or nonsense, of what is being said.

That seems to be the philosophy behind "Children of the Shadows," a ten-part series which ran in *The New York Times* during the month of April. Ten children or adolescents ranging in age from ten to nineteen, and either from the urban "underclass" or living in close proximity to the more unpleasant social effects associated with it, were interviewed extensively about their lives, their thoughts, and their feelings. I suppose the progressive idea is that if, as in therapy, listening is valuable for its own sake, then the underclass has a right to just as much of it as it does to the other good things of which a rich society produces a superfluity.

Ostensibly, the purpose of the series was to reveal to the *Times*'s white, middle-class readership what it is really like to be poor and a member of a minority ethnic or racial group. Amazingly enough, however, these poor, mainly black and Hispanic kids managed to sound uncannily like the white, middle-class liberals who write for *The New York Times*! What, as Jay Leno would say, are the odds of that? You might think that tales of "children of often desperate and broken families . . . who daily face the lures of drugs, sex, fast money and guns" would be absolutely riveting stuff. It is not. All but one, a sixteen-year-old drug dealer from Bridgeport, Connecticut, profess to abominate these excitements and to aspire to lives of dull, bourgeois respectability, as, in the words of one of them, "any kind of lawyer or a rapper or an accountant or something."

Such respectability, it is assumed, only eludes them because of broken homes and irresponsible parents, or because of racism,

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sexism, poor education, and an oppressive or incompetent criminal justice system, or perhaps because guilt-stricken white liberal adults are just not listening to them enough. But what do they hear when they do listen? Crystal Rossi, a twelve-year-old girl from Brooklyn, is offered the forum of *The New York Times*'s front page to tell the world that, to her, "school serves no purpose." Down in darkest Bensonhurst, it seems, it is possible to find children who say that "classes are boring and the teachers are mean."

Extraordinary thing, isn't it? We who listen seem to be invited to conclude that life for such poor "children of the shadows" is a Hobbesian nightmare to rival the darkest chapters of human history. And Miss Rossi has her counterpart even in the estimable *Spectator* of London, which once delighted in exposing cant and stupidity in public life. In March it published a piece by a sixteen-year-old called Emma Forrest, who proclaimed on behalf of her generation the historic discovery that hard work was overrated and that reading was obsolete. "Unliteracy," she wrote, "is our unique contribution to modern culture." At least she didn't blame her teachers.

Of course, many of the children in the *Times* series do live appallingly unhappy lives, but their own analyses of why they do so rarely offer any insight unavailable to the rest of us. And when a seventeen-year-old guesses that the school dropout rate is so high because of "lack of funding" or an eighteen-year-old that economic times are hard because "there are less factory jobs," you know that something other than the voice of authentic experience on those mean streets is coming through. Why should we be surprised? Children always parrot what they hear from their elders or the television or each other. What is new is the respectful attention with which their elders—men and women who in their own youth discovered something called "the generation gap"—listen to their earnest nonsense.

The young, of course, are idiotic by nature and can always hope to grow out of it, but what hope is there for the middle-aged who have had to learn their idiocy, and who seem determined to carry it to their graves? They are the victims of the most up-to-date form of selfishness and self-deception, which imagines itself "compassionate" because it indulges the fantasies of the immature, the stupid, and the vicious, and "caring" because it withholds the judgment of wisdom from imprudent and self-destructive behavior. Hey! At least we *listen*!

Such listeners are selfish, too, in the sense that they learn nothing from all that they hear. Those *New York Times* reporters who lowered their buckets so many fathoms deep into the underclass came up with nothing to revise or modify their own assumptions about the world. On the contrary, their purpose seems to have been to confirm such assumptions. The exciting street life, the ephemeral relationships, the crime and the violence—all are there only to provide supererogatory proof for such propositions as that great liberal favorite that, for the children of the shadows, "life is not the neat, suburban script of sitcom mythology with father, mother, two kids and golden retriever."

The curious thing about that statement, taken from the first of the ten profiles, is the implicit assumption that the "sitcom mythology" is a kind of universal norm from which any deviation must perforce frighten and horrify us. What does the writer, Isabel Wilkerson, imagine her readers have been watching in the thirty years or so since "Ozzie and Harriet" stopped producing its neat suburban scripts? The "sitcom mythology" today is more often represented by the very un-neat suburban scripts of "Roseanne" or the strange urban "family" of "Seinfeld," which consists of four middle-aged kids taking a permanent leave in the big city from their mothers and fathers and golden retrievers.

These four constitute a kind of shadow-family for each other—not just in the sense that they are affectionate but teasing, that they live in each other's pockets and get on each other's nerves, but also in the sense in

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that the ghost of parental disapproval still hangs over the carefree lives of these permanent adolescents. In a typical episode, George (Jason Alexander) is caught by his mother (Estelle Harris) in the act of masturbating at her house when, thinking her not around, he has idly picked up a copy of *Glamour* magazine. She faints and breaks, or strains, something in falling over. The embarrassment to George, if not the injury to his mother, is meant to be screamingly funny, and discussion of it leads to a contest among the four yuppies to see who can go the longest without masturbating.

The word itself, by the way, is never used during the episode, but the act is referred to, with giggles, as "you know" and "doing *that*." Meanwhile, a subplot has Seinfeld trying to entice his virgin girlfriend into bed by pretending that sexual intercourse is not his main object in taking her out. These people are adults in their thirties but they continue to live with the problems and the concerns of high-school kids. It may not be too much to suggest that the injury to George's mother is a punishment meted out to her by the show's writers for being the unwanted and monitory presence of adulthood in the midst of these youthful hi-jinks. The introduction into prime time of what used to be called "adult material" may or may not turn out to have corrupted our youth but it has certainly led to the corruption of adult material.

Even if we avoid the giggling Scylla heads of "Seinfeld" we are likely to steer into the Charybdis of politics, as in the CBS series "Picket Fences," which now follows "Seinfeld" at 10 o'clock on Thursday evenings. There they do to sex the only thing worse than converting it into adolescent giggles, which is converting it into matter for earnest political moralizing. One recent Thursday, for example, "Picket Fences" treated us to the moving story of a high-school girl "confused about her sexuality." Kimberly (Holly Combs) is enticed into kissing Lisa, a schoolfellow (Alexondra Lee), because both are curious about what it would be like and they have so much in common: "How many other kids at school," says Lisa, "have read the Faludi book?"

You've got to admit she's on to something there. Her horrid little brother, however, overhears the two girls talking about The Kiss and runs to tell their mother (Kathy Baker) that his sister is "a dyke." Mother replies: "That's an offensive term, Matthew." (Pause) "But when you use it, how do you mean it?" It is a funny line, but I was left with the horrible suspicion that it is not meant to be funny. Instead, Mom and Dad (Tom Skerritt) are meant to be seen playing out a serious drama about the conflict between their progressive principles ("We're two liberal people and pro-gay rights; we don't even go to Colorado") and a more visceral concern for their daughter. They agonize: "Even if we could make a difference, would we really want to brainwash our daughter on sexual preference? Is that something that two enlightened people could do?"

Alas, we never find out, for it transpires that Kimberly didn't really like The Kiss that much (though, with nice even-handedness, Lisa did—no offense to the gay lobby there, I hope!) and has decided to go back to being a heterosexual. Phew! That was a close shave for the parents. But we, less lucky than they are, are left to reflect that one of the consequences of indiscriminate listening is that action becomes increasingly problematical. And in a medium as shy of controversy as television is, it is easier just to write the possibility of action and therefore real conflict out of the script. The concerned parents do not have to do anything but be concerned—which means listening and professing affection—to make the problem go away.

But their question lingers in the mind. It was given a round answer only days before during the gay and lesbian demonstration in Washington, where a lesbian speaker, clearly expecting the answer she got, asked the crowd: if they could take a pill that would magically convert them all to heterosexuals, would they do it? And the crowd thundered back: No! But does such a building block in the edifice of gay solidarity make no one ner-

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vous? Would Martin Luther King have asked his Washington marchers if they would take a pill that would make them white? The very posing of the question implies an anxiety about the answer, a subliminal consciousness not only that heterosexuality is expected of them but that they expect it of themselves.

Though few would admit it, it is at least arguable that vehement proclamations of gay pride are expressions of an attitude like that of the teen rebel who wants to be bad just *because* it is bad. Both know, for one thing, that that is how you get people's attention. Like the children interviewed by *The New York Times*, the crowd of gays just wanted to be listened to, both in this particular demonstration—carried live on C-SPAN but considerably toned down on other networks for, as Howard Kurtz disingenuously says, "fear of offending some portion of their audience"—and in many of the objects it was organized to promote, such as laws guaranteeing the rights of gays as a specially protected group.

And, for several days at least, they were listened to—not only by the people who would have listened to them anyway but also by serious columnists such as William Raspberry, Charles Krauthammer, and John Leo, who felt it incumbent on themselves to assay explanations of why they were opposed to the militant gay agenda and why, nevertheless, they should not be considered homophobes. The Right was listening too, and the Christian Action Network offered congressmen and their staffs an "exclusive screening" of the television footage of the march not broadcast, as if it were the director's cut of a borderline pornographic film. As usual, it was the bad boys and girls ("Viewer discretion is advised. Some scenes are graphic and explicit") who were guaranteed the closest attention.

For the select few who attend to what goes on on the commanding heights of the culture there was also a special issue of *The New Republic*, which, under the editorship of Andrew Sullivan, is becoming the most respectable and intelligent mouthpiece for the homosexual subculture—good news for the homosexual subculture, bad news for *The New Republic*, which is in danger of becoming too closely identified with the issue. Among the articles are John Boswell's fascinating study of gay soldiers in classical times, which seems to argue that homoeroticism does wonders for the morale of fighting men but which makes few allowances for other cultural differences between then and now. Also, Jonathan Rauch does a splendid piece on why gays are not "oppressed," and Michael Lewis turns in an *Esquire*-style bill of advice to "straights" on how a gentleman reacts to unwanted gay propositions.

Sullivan himself writes the long and thoughtful cover story identifying and setting out four different rationales for moral approaches to homosexuality. He does this for the most part with fairness to those who disagree with him but finally rejects all four rationales as threatening, respectively, the existence, the integrity, the dignity, or the distinctness of homosexuals. His conclusion is that they should get a sort of Equal Rights Amendment and that's all. Afterwards no one should have to make a political or moral issue out of homosexuality ever again. Like many another philosopher, Sullivan strikes one as being a trifle naïve.

Also, neither he nor his fellow *New Republic*ans addresses what seems to me to be, the moral question being moot, the only aspect of the gay issue worthy of political consideration: its decorum. For an example of what I mean, consider the following item from *The Washington Post*'s "Reliable Source" column:

> *The New York Times* got a bit of egg on its face Sunday when, in a story about President Clinton's meeting with leaders in the gay community, Alexis Herman was mistakenly characterized as one of three "gay and lesbian White House staff members who were present."
>
> Herman was said to be upset by the scores of calls she received on her home answering machine—some of them tasteless and hostile. The reporter, Jeffrey Schmalz, said yesterday that he had written a correction to appear in

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today's *Times* explaining that he had "misidentified the sexual orientation" of the White House director of public liaison—and that she is heterosexual.

Aren't you glad that that's cleared up? But why a serious newspaper should be either identifying or misidentifying, as a matter of public record, the "sexual orientation" of a White House adviser in the first place remains murky. It suggests a blurring of the boundary between public and private which, if allowed its career unimpeded, must lead to the destruction of civil society.

Any political identification derived from such a private business as sex must be implicated in compromising the very idea of privacy. That is the paradox of the gay movement, which seeks public protection for private acts by making private acts public property and which threatens official sanctions and indoctrination as a means to the enforcement of tolerance. But one knows why they do it. They must stake out and aggressively defend their corner of the media territory if they are to compete for public sympathy with Bosnia or Somalia, to say nothing of the Armenians, for whom Cher is doing her bit, or the Sudanese, on whose behalf Mary McGrory has lamented the absence of heart-tugging pictures and soundbites.

Even Bosnia has to work hard to keep its audience share. Such, at any rate, is my conclusion from the broadcast on Court TV of the trial of a Bosnian-Serb militiaman accused of raping and murdering Muslims. "Watch the Serbian War Crimes Trial tonight, only on Court TV," said the full-page ad in *The New York Times*. So of course I did. One Borislav Herak confessed to a Bosnian tribunal that he had raped Muslim girls under orders from a commanding officer who thought that his doing so would be "good for morale." Serbian morale, he meant, not Muslim. Later, he had been ordered to murder them, he said, to ensure their silence because "the TV people were coming with cameras."

Irony! Here now was Mr. Herak before the cameras after all, brought to you by Wonder Foam carpet cleaner, by *40 Doo Wop Classics* on cassette or CD, not available in stores, by Advil, for pounding headaches, by *Prevention* magazine and your free copy of *The Healing Foods*, by Preparation H for hemorrhoids and Compound W for warts and by the Craftmatic Adjustable Bed. The war criminal must have had some dim sense of his commercial viability, too, for in the final scene he asked for a cigarette and expressed great satisfaction, when he got it, that it was a Marlboro. Bosnia looks for the time being to be unchallenged in the preeminence of its claims upon our attention and concern.

How much longer this may be true it is not easy to say, for it is beginning to look as if soon we shall be our own Bosnia. The gays and "the children of the shadows" are just two of the best-known voices that demand to be listened to, but they are competing with unemployed defense workers and breast-cancer sufferers and co-dependents and a thousand other groups who identify themselves as afflicted. All of them are as unhappy as the gays are, and all are looking for someone to blame their unhappiness on. That is what politics is increasingly becoming: a competition among the aggrieved as to whose grievance is to be listened to first and soothed by the inarticulate cooings of the nanny state. But neither political nor civil society can survive for long unless we can all learn to stop being such good listeners.

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Books

Through a glass darkly

by James W. Tuttleton

Can we all get along?
—Rodney King

For many years now we have been usefully instructed by a steady stream of volumes in what has come to be called "American ethnic history"—narrative accounts, that is, of the experience of immigrant groups who have come to (or been forcibly brought to) this country for varying personal and political reasons. Among such books, Albert Camarillo's *Chicanos in a Changing Society*, Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of East European Jews to America*, and Yuji Ichioka's *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants* are exemplary. But many others—like Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West,* Kerby A. Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, and Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*—have also usefully enlarged our sense of what was alike and what was dissimilar in the ethnic or migrational experience of our immigrant groups. Today, however, in this "post-Rodney King era," such narrowly focused studies of individual ethnic groups will not do any longer.

That, at least, is the viewpoint of Ronald Takaki, professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of several well-known studies of immigrant experience, including *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii* and *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans.* Professor Takaki's new work, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America,*[1] is intended to avoid the earlier "fragmenting" of America, which occurred when Howe and others studied "each group separately, in isolation from the other groups and the whole." In *A Different Mirror* what we have is an interwoven history of the Puritans and the Indians, the Indians and Southern whites, the Southern whites and black slaves, the wild Irish in the North and the South, the blacks and the Jews, the Mexicans and Anglos, and the Chinese and the Japanese mainly in California. In its temporal and geographical scope it is a big book; it aspires to be the text of choice in the multicultural courses now mandated across the country; and it provokes a great many reflections, some that the author may not have intended.

First, let it be said that Professor Takaki has handled, very adroitly, the problem of moving into and away from the experience of specific ethnic groups while yet developing—over the long chronological continuum—an ongoing central narrative about the development of America as a whole. Readable and fluent, *A Different Mirror* is also timely, in addressing issues that have come to be known as the Rainbow Cur-

1 *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, by Ronald Takaki; Little, Brown, 508 pages, $27.95.

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riculum; it reflects wide research into immigrant history and demographics; and it evinces a definite point of view. It does not flinch at what it sees in the ethnic history of America, and it has an agenda for the days ahead. Professor Takaki believes that our vision of the future will be dictated by the image of the past that is victorious. And he is intent on seeing that his view of our past will win out. That view may be summarized as "America does not belong to one race or one group."

That's fair enough. In fact, America belongs to a great many more groups than Professor Takaki pays attention to. I wish there were some significant consideration of the Dutch in early New York, the French in Creole Louisiana, the Swedes in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and the current Jamaicans in Queens. Since I live close to the World Trade Center, I would like to know more about Egyptian Muslims in Jersey City; and some information about Serbs in New York City would be useful. But why quibble? We are so diverse a nation that even *A Different Mirror* cannot reflect us all—especially since a good many of us are here illegally, a fact that does not seem to concern the Immigration and Naturalization Service or prospective Attorneys General in search of cheap nannies.

On the other hand, it is not mere quibbling to complain that, for Professor Takaki, our history pretty much comes down to the history of ethnic victimization—one group after another, rebuked and scorned, hustled, manipulated, and exploited, invariably by the white American power structure. The evidence here is substantial. No one can doubt the melancholy fate of the American Indian—continually cheated of land, his treaties betrayed, and finally rounded up and sent to remote reservations. Of all ethnic groups in America, the American Indian has been the most violent and the least assimilable; but we are reluctant to acknowledge that uncivilized savagery has been—and is—an ethnic reality in various parts of the world at various times. Doubtless to acknowledge this would hurt the feelings of some tribal members, and nowadays we are into building ethnic self-esteem, even if we have to falsify the ethnic past. But go back far enough and we all find a pretty wild ancestry.

But Indians are only part of the story. The history of black slavery is likewise a blot upon the national character. "No Irish need apply" tells its own story, as does the to-let placard *"Keine Juden, und keine Hunde."* "When I first came," wrote Andrew Kan, "Chinese treated worse than dog. . . . The hoodlums, roughnecks and young boys pull your queue, slap your face, throw all kind of old vegetables and rotten eggs at you." The Mexicans who stayed in the old Southwest and California after the Mexican-American War, both grandees and peons, found themselves spurned as "foreigners in their own land." And a good many American citizens who happened to be of Japanese descent were illegally interned during World War II. (In a special flourish of political correctness, Professor Takaki offers subsections, in very nearly each chapter, indicating how much *worse* it was for the women of each particular ethnic group.)

And yet, with the exception of kidnapped blacks on slave ships, how eagerly and willingly ethnics have kept on coming. "Over in Ireland people marry for riches," one Irishwoman wrote in Philadelphia, "but here in America we marry for love and work for riches." A Chinese worker in nineteenth-century California could make ten times what he could in China. The Japanese created the national market for California farm produce: "Much of what you call willow forests then," a Japanese farmer rightly boasted in 1924, "Japanese took that land, cleared it and made it fine farming land." Pablo Mares of Jalisco came to Estados Unidos, he said, "because it was impossible to live down there with so many revolutions." "The day begins with my pushcart full of fruit," says one of Anzia Yezierska's Jewish peddlars, "and the day never ends before I count up at least two dollars' profit—that means . . . four rubles a day, twenty-four rubles a week! . . . [W]hite bread and meat I eat every day just like the millionaires."

It is rather difficult to square such en-

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thusiasm about America with Professor Takaki's rather dismal account of the unremitting brutalization of ethnics at the hands of already-established Americans. How were they brutalized? First, simply by being different, they were demonized or discriminated against. Race and skin color were decisive factors. But much of Takaki's indictment also involves rotten landlords who insist on getting paid their rent and employers' labor practices, which are always "unfair." Government officials, white corporation officers, railroad managers, agribusiness overseers, even union figures have it in—in Takaki's scenario—for the ethnics. They don't give the Mexican a job; or if they do hire him, the labor market is "deliberately oversupplied" in order to force him to work for peanuts. If Japanese laborers are hired, the white bosses also hire Koreans so as to pit ethnic enemies against each other, prevent union solidarity, and get maximum productivity. Naturally, if the ethnics strike, scabs are hired. If Mexicans are given jobs, they will be denounced for having them: "Is it a pretty sight to see men, brawny American men with callouses on their hands and empty stomachs—sitting idly on benches in the plaza," asked the American Federation of Labor's organ, *The Advocate*, "while slim-legged peons with tortillas in their stomachs, work in the tall building across the way?" Ah, even ethnic success brings about a backlash of prejudice.

Whose prejudice? There is certainly no point in trying to wave away the racial and ethnic prejudice of already established white Americans who have been in a position to govern, hire, or otherwise direct the lives of immigrants. Those already here, of whatever background, have always taken a singular pleasure in trying to flummox or control the greenhorns. And for quite a while it was widely believed that the U.S. government ought to lead the way. As one white congressman put it: "This continent was intended by Providence as a vast theatre on which to work out the grand experiment of Republican government, under the auspices of the Anglo-Saxon race." Yet, despite notions of Manifest Destiny, it will be plain from a number of these examples that a great deal of ethnic prejudice was transported here in steerage. If the Irish and Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent can't get along, it doesn't take the IRA to explain why.

Further, if the Korean- and Japanese-Americans are at swords' point, the reasons are rooted in their Oriental past, not in Anglo-Saxon deviousness. Most sons of the Old Sod opposed black emancipation as setting "the Niggers high" at the expense of the Irish workingman. And most Mexican and Japanese farm workers resented the Portuguese and Filipinos for depriving them of work—in taking jobs at what used to be called "coolie wages." Come to think of it, the Iroquois hated the Algonquins, and the Senecas butchered the Delawares. Ethnic cleansing has had a long history, even in this country. At one point a light dawns, and Professor Takaki seems alarmed by his own accumulating evidence: "What is the nature of malevolence? Is there a deep, perhaps primordial, need for group identity rooted in hatred for the other?" He has no answer to this question, which runs against his romantic liberal optimism, but the historical evidence seems decisive. Very little separates America from Bosnia—except that structure of interconnected cultural institutions (in law, government, religion, economics, and education) that distinguishes America from other places. Unfortunately, Professor Takaki doesn't seem to be able to connect this cultural structure, which is Eurocentric in origin, with the appeal of America for ethnics.

It should also be said that Professor Takaki has little interest in the psychology of immigrants. But I sense in many of his examples a great deal of undirected anger. To abandon one's homeland—even for a rational cause like escaping starvation, a revolution, or a pogrom—is likely to produce rage at what fate has compelled. On top of that, even America, with her "streets of gold," cannot live up to immigrant expectations. There is, amongst many ethnics, a deep sense of failure, a great deal of felt

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worthlessness, and a simmering rage. It is now convenient to ventilate it at White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Things are regularly said about WASPs that, if said about blacks or Jews, would mobilize the Reverend Al Sharpton and get out the Jewish Defense League. The present generation of WASPs seem to understand that they are elected to be scapegoats for the disappointment that immigration creates and for the failure of past ethnic harmony. These WASPs seem self-confident enough to live with this role imposed on them, or else they see it as a harmless way to ventilate this rather dangerous ethnic rage. On the other hand, while all ethnics seem agreed that WASPs are hogging the streets of gold, it is mainly on each other that ethnics turn. Very nearly every ethnic group seems ready to denounce all the others. Life in the United States, in this ghetto mentality, comes down to my turf versus that of all other ghettos.

In this competition for a slice of the American pie, by the way, ethnic rage is reassuringly constrained by a remarkable combination of civil-rights laws that punish gross forms of discrimination. On the whole, it should be remarked, civil-rights legislation in this country—from the ratification of the Constitution to whatever Mr. Clinton may have in mind—is mainly the work of Eurocentric white politicians well grounded in Roman law, English common law, and American Constitutional history. Some of the most recent decisive actions intended to break down discrimination against ethnics—the integration of blacks into mainstream American life, the prohibition of prejudice in public matters based on sex, age, handicaps, ethnic background, etc.—were the work of WASP politicians like Harry Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Nevertheless, what seems to be evident is that—despite remarkable progress in the area of civil rights and discrimination against persons or ethnic groups—there is plenty of prejudice to go around, and it doesn't all come from the Anglos. What accounts for it? Racism is continually thrown around as the answer. But obviously we cannot go on blaming ethnic discrimination for all America's ills when the post-World War II civil-rights laws, vigilantly enforced, do a fairly good job in eliminating at least its overt forms. Professor Takaki is uncomfortable with the idea that, despite wonderful civil-rights laws, ethnic hostility still abounds. Thus he plays the game that all liberals do. He switches from the problem of endemic tribal or ethnic hostility to the problem of income levels. WASPs are nasty to the welfare class, and ethnic groups are hostile to each other because of their relative status on the economic ladder. And if we could only eliminate poverty, all the ethnic groups, now at each other's throats, would get along wonderfully. Harmony would at last prevail. Would it?

I don't think that there is any doubt that Japanese- and Korean-Americans have earned the respect of a sizable majority of the American people. They have done so by becoming what Professor Takaki uneasily calls "model minorities." They have proved that by thrift, hard work, and the prudential virtues an ethnic group—with a colored skin, a different culture, and another language—can pull itself up by its own bootstraps, attain education, succeed economically, and so obviate the need for ethnic affirmative-action quotas and welfare. These groups illustrate, for most Americans, what the American dream has always meant; and they prove that it remains a fulfillable possibility. Professor Takaki is uneasy because he believes that the praise of model minorities is a white political stratagem really directed at blacks. And to celebrate their success will expose Asian-Americans to black rage. (Indeed, in the wake of the Rodney King trial, some ghetto blacks in Los Angeles openly targeted Korean businesses, while the police, outrageously, stood around and, for days, did nothing. Paradoxically, the majority of those arrested for riot and looting were Hispanics.)

Professor Takaki doesn't want Asian-American success highlighted. He even wants to deny that Asian-Americans have succeeded. If they have more spending money, he

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doesn't want it known. He stands for inconspicuous consumption in their case. Politically, he wants in fact a Rainbow Coalition of liberal politicians and anti-Reaganites who will put unemployed men onto the government payroll and disadvantaged mothers onto welfare. He is under the delusion that, with the end of the Cold War, there is going to be a peace dividend of billions for Bill Clinton to distribute to the ethnic poor, and with poverty eliminated the peaceable kingdom will at last have arrived. Any critique of the uselessness of long-term government patronage he decries as, paradoxically, a manifestation of a "cultural war" against ethnics, a reflection of "a traditional Eurocentrism that remains culturally hegemonic." For him, any resistance to the multicultural agenda of big-government patronage of ethnics fuels the "disuniting of America."

I for one do not agree with this reading of the ethnic scene. In her memoirs, *A Backward Glance* (1934), the WASP American novelist Edith Wharton remarked that the "really vital change" between the 1870s and the 1930s was that "in my youth, the Americans of the original States, who in moments of crisis still shaped the national point of view, were the heirs of an old tradition of European culture which the country has now totally rejected. This rejection (which Mr. Walter Lippmann regards as the chief cause of the country's present moral impoverishment) has opened a gulf between those days and these." Mrs. Wharton thought that the European tradition had been totally abandoned; and so, in the political turmoil of the Depression, it might have seemed to people of her class and background.

But in fact, it is a European inheritance of constitutional law and a respect for civil rights—a European tradition continually modified and transformed by changing American political and social actualities, especially in dealing with immigrant groups—that distinguishes the United States and in part attracts foreign groups to our shores. It is this inherited tradition that has substantially prevented the kind of "ethnic cleansing" that we see in respect to the tribal warfare going on all over black Africa, the savagery of the Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the Kurds and the Iraqis, the Palestinians and Israelis, the Hindus and the Muslims, the Serbs and the Croats, etc., etc. By the middle of the next century, more than half of the American people will trace their ancestry to somewhere in the Third World. They or their ancestors will have been attracted here largely because of our relative freedom from state controls, our economic opportunities, and a constitutional system that can protect us from the undue discrimination, not to speak of the genocide, that readily occurs elsewhere. When we turn our backs on our Western inheritance, which has been so attractive to immigrants, in favor of some Third World model, we will be living in Bosnia.

A life of his own

Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy
Gerald Brenan: The Interior Castle.
A Biography.
Norton, 660 pages, $35

reviewed by Mark Falcoff

Although he died less than a decade ago at the ripe age of ninety-three, Gerald Brenan is already fast slipping into literary oblivion. Even in the field to which he made his greatest contribution—Spanish studies—today's graduate student would be hard pressed to identify the man, still less to have read his works. In some ways this is understandable: Brenan was not a university-trained academic but a man of letters of the most old-fashioned type. He picked the subjects he wanted to write about; worked as long on them as he pleased. Because he did not need to worry about making a living, he could afford to wait until the public discovered him. Once it did, from the mid-1940s on, no figure in the English-speaking world was regarded as a better (or more readable) authority on Spain—its literature first of all, but its broader culture and life as

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well. Meanwhile, however, times (and intellectual fashions) have greatly changed.

The publication of a major biography of the man by Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, first in Great Britain and now a year later in the United States, is a serious effort to rectify matters, though one approaches this weighty tome wondering whether it is really quite needed. After all, Brenan himself was careful to provide us with an ample accounting of his life in two volumes of memoirs, *A Life of One's Own* (1962) and *A Personal Record* (1974). Those who knew the man only from his charming accounts of Spanish life in *The Face of Spain* (1950) or *South from Granada* (1957) were in for a shock when they finished the last of these two books, for in *A Personal Record* Brenan revealed himself to have been something of a monster—almost unimaginably selfish and self-centered, sexually predatory, and a sponger to boot. What could a biographer, particularly one who concedes he was personally close to the subject in his later years, add to the Picture of Dorian Gray?

The answer is—not very much and a great deal. Gathorne-Hardy had access to a huge cache of letters written by Brenan to various friends, as well as the opportunity to look into the papers of several of his closest contemporaries. Some of the people in the story were still alive when he began his research. He was also able to peruse a good part of what might be called the "Bloomsbury archives"—variously deposited now in King's College, Cambridge; the University of Texas Humanities Research Center; and McMaster and Sussex universities. Many misstatements and exaggerations have been corrected; one-sided versions of events have been rounded out; some figures dealt with by Brenan only in passing (or not at all) have been given a full accounting. One stands in awe—let it be said straightaway—at the biographer's sheer industry and devotion. Unfortunately our view of Brenan, thus corrected and amplified, does not render him more appealing. One can only hope that *South from Granada*, not this biography, is the way that future readers discover the man and his work.

Gerald Brenan was born in Malta in 1894, where his father, a British army officer, was then posted. The family subsequently lived in Africa and India, until Hugh Brenan was forced into a premature retirement by encroaching deafness. Gerald's adolescence was a typical late-Edwardian idyll—public schools, long summers in fashionable watering places, holidays in France. Brenan's father expected his son to follow in his footsteps to Sandhurst, and to this end he saw to it that he was assigned to the leading games house at school. The young man already had other ideas, however, finding a world of his own in books and dreams of "abroad." When—despite his best efforts to fail it—Gerald passed the Sandhurst entrance examination, he sought to escape his fate by disappearing with one of his teachers, John Hope-Johnstone, on a long "walk." The excursion was originally intended to take the two as far as Turkestan but actually ended in Italy, by which time Hope-Johnstone had lost the relish for travel under rough circumstances, and young Brenan was totally broke.

Terrified at the prospect that his son might disappear forever, Hugh Brenan agreed to compromise. He sent the young man the funds to return to England, and relented on the demand that he go to Sandhurst. Instead, he allowed him to apply for a commission in the India Police, which for some unaccountable reason required competence in German. For this purpose Gerald went off to Germany, to study with a crammer, where he remained until June 1914. The following month he returned to Britain, just in time for the outbreak of war. Plans for the India Police were shelved; instead, his father was able to use old service connections to get him a commission in the 5th Gloucesters, the unit with which he was to spend the next four years.

In spite of his rebellious temperament, Brenan had, by his own accounting, "a good war." This was probably because, with his firm knowledge of French, he was immediately picked out for liaison duties. This made it possible for him to move about

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much of the time with little or no supervision. He was even able to usefully employ the long periods of enforced idleness on the Western front by plunging into books. (He was already developing formidable powers of concentration—the kind that allowed him to go at a book as much as eleven hours at a stretch.) This is not to say that he was a slacker; at one time he was the artillery observer for an entire corps, one of a dozen along the entire Western front. He ended the war with both the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre.

Sometime late in the war Brenan wrote a friend that his dream was "a cottage in Spain and the life on the roads and books and liberty." He was twenty-four years old at the time. For the next seventy years Brenan did exactly that—he went to Spain, he traveled, and he wrote. He never held a regular job of any kind. He was able to defy his parents on this score because of an elderly aunt, from whom he was able to extract a monthly allowance. (He subsequently inherited the whole of her estate.) This permitted him to take a house in Yegen, a remote village in the Alpujarras Mountains of Spain, the same place immortalized in his book *South from Granada*. There he read quite literally hundreds of books, sometimes as many as a dozen at a time.

Like the South African poet, translator, and critic Roy Campbell, whom he resembles in a number of ways, Gerald Brenan led a life which sounds more romantic in the telling than it was in reality. For one thing, he spent far less time in Spain than his books lead one to believe. (He was there on and off in 1921-24, and lived there again in 1935-37, but he did not return until well after the Second World War.) Though in print he made much of Yegen's warmth and spontaneity, in letters home he often complained about the loneliness and boredom of the village (he was always begging friends to come out for a visit). He made few friends among Spaniards, and, at least in Gathorne-Hardy's telling, never advanced much beyond Andalusian kitchen Spanish. (Unlike Roy Campbell, he neither sought out nor knew any of the major Spanish writers, at least until the very end of his life, by which time he had become a cult figure in post-Franco Spain.) Of the three million words of his correspondence which survive, not one letter is addressed to a Spanish recipient.

Indeed, for much of the Twenties the major focus of his life was not Spain at all, but "Bloomsbury"—that is to say, an effete group of self-indulgent bores and parasites drawn from the more affluent sectors of English bohemia. Here the draw was the painter Dora Carrington, a central figure in Bloomsbury circles, though it is difficult now to understand quite why. Certainly her artistic talents were vastly overrated; as for her feminine charms, those too elude our contemporary grasp. The best the gallant Gathorne-Hardy can do is to assure us that she "seduced men with her letters."

In the event, she drove Brenan to near-distraction, and forced him into acute sexual rivalry with his best friend, Ralph Partridge, another writer whom he had met while serving on the Western front. Partridge eventually won the contest, but his victory was strangely Pyrrhic: apparently Carrington, who had strong lesbian tendencies, was really in love with the homosexual writer Lytton Strachey. She therefore forced her husband to accommodate a (necessarily inconclusive) *ménage à trois* at Ham Spray in Wiltshire. When Strachey died in early 1932 after an unsuccessful appendectomy, Carrington promptly committed suicide.

Brenan's loss of Carrington to Ralph Partridge led him to seek consolation in the arms of a succession of anonymous English shopgirls, and then back to Spain, where he fathered a daughter by his principal servant, Juliana. In 1931 he returned to England, where he met and married Gamel Woolsey. A striking woman from the American South, Woolsey had come over to England to pursue a dramatic career, eventually transferring her interests to literature. By the time Brenan met her, she was under the influence of the Welsh poet Llewelyn Powys, with whom she was living in a *ménage à trois*. Brenan and Woolsey were married after a

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whirlwind courtship—bigamously, as it turns out, since she had not bothered to divorce the American husband from whom she was separated.

In many ways Gamel was an ideal companion for Brenan. She shared his love of travel and did not mind acute discomfort on the road; she was good at foreign languages; she was equally committed to the literary life. Another charm, presumably not a small one, was her private income—the equivalent in 1990 prices of about thirty-five hundred pounds a year.

The Brenans lived in East Lulworth, Wareham, for the first four years of their marriage, returning to Spain in 1935. The choice was dictated primarily by economics; Brenan preferred living in France, but it was too expensive. Besides, Gathorne-Hardy writes, "Spain [offered] just the right combination of monotonous calm to let him write, with sufficient social junketing to keep him stimulated." In some ways, he adds, the Brenans hardly lived in Spain at all; most of their friends were either expatriates or friends visiting from England. The fact that this time Brenan chose not a remote, impoverished village but Churriana, near Marbella (province of Málaga), underscored the preference for Britain Abroad, rather than the Spain of most Spaniards.

The Brenans' stay was cut short by the outbreak of the civil war in the summer of 1936, though they stayed on as long as they could, leaving Málaga—the last British residents to do so—in 1937. They settled at Aldbourne in Wiltshire, where Brenan plunged into the research that would eventually produce *The Spanish Labyrinth*, the most extensive and authoritative study on the origins of the Spanish Civil War to appear in any language, which finally came out in 1943.

At the time Brenan was nearly fifty years old, and famously unknown. His output at that point consisted of one novel, published under the name of George Beaton in 1934, which left no great impression. The rest of his *oeuvre* was not only unpublished but unfinished—six or seven novellas, a life of Saint Teresa of Avila (on which he had already labored fourteen years), innumerable stories, plays, and verse narratives. Suddenly, and quite overnight, he became the best-known interpreter of Spain to the English-speaking world, and over time, to much of the rest of the globe as well.

Even today it is difficult to overestimate the importance of *The Spanish Labyrinth*. At the time Spanish studies hardly existed as a discipline anywhere outside of Spain itself (and even there it was largely tethered to old-fashioned disciplines like philology). Because of the international impact of the Spanish Civil War—the first ideological civil war of the twentieth century, and also the first civil war in a "backward" country which was viewed as a struggle by proxy between emerging great powers—hundreds of books and pamphlets on Spain had appeared in a dozen European languages between 1936 and 1939. Indeed, they would continue to appear long after Brenan's book was published. However, most of them were driven by the larger ideological issues, in which Spain—the real Spain—tended to get lost in the special pleading. There was also a tendency—particularly after the republican collapse—to indulge in revolutionary nostalgia. Even George Orwell's masterpiece, *Homage to Catalonia* (1937), does not fully escape the trap. Brenan thought of himself as "a conservative in the short range, a socialist in the long range," and was not easily carried away by utopian fantasies.

Brenan was not, to be sure, the first writer to question the pieties of left-liberal (or *marxisant*) historiography. A handful of Catholic writers in England and France had already labored to set forth the specifically Spanish issues in the war. But Brenan's book was the first to do so from a straightforwardly pro-republican point of view. He also greatly exceeded the Catholic apologists in balance and fairness, subtlety, and knowledge of where contemporary controversies belonged in the larger matrix of Spanish history. For the next two decades no book, certainly no book in English or French, provided outsiders with so rich and carefully

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textured a view of where Spain's past intersected with its present.[1] The amount of work which went into it can only be guessed by this sarcastic remark by Gamel, made in 1937 when he was already deep into the research: "Gerald's latest act is to read the entire history of ceramics before he ha[s] to write half a page about Spanish pottery." The painstaking craftsmanship, the patience, the willingness to slog through acres of intellectual underbrush is nowhere apparent in this or subsequent books; like an accomplished ballet dancer, Brenan made everything look easy.

These virtues also characterized the second great book produced at Aldbourne, *The Literature of the Spanish People*, published in 1950. It stood for many years as the most readable and enjoyable book on the subject, firm in its knowledge of materials and confident in its literary judgments. Of course, Brenan was building here on literally hundreds of thousands of hours of work spread over many decades; there was probably not a single work upon which he commented which he had not read several times. Moreover, unlike what passes for literary history today, it was a book not merely about literature but about the country itself.

Here are a few examples which illustrate the point. On the nineteenth-century novelist Benito Pérez Galdós: "Under [his] skin there was both a Christian who gave absolution and a Marxist who attributed the sins of the children to their fathers." On the work of Galician novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán: "Writing of a country proverbial for its wistfulness and charm, she never allows herself to idealize anything but the scenery." Or this remark about an early-eighteenth-century novel: "We see in [these] early chapters what one is tempted to call the real Spain, the Spain of vast plateaux and earth-colored villages and bad communications, and the almost inconceivably monotonous life that goes on there."

Brenan also wrote from a critical point of view which, to put it mildly, would not be much in fashion nowadays. Just because of that it is worth quoting at some length:

> Works of art and literature are, in my opinion, to be valued by the depth and quality of the experience they convey, and by the immediacy and clarity with which they convey it, rather than by their moral and ideological rightness. Ethical considerations only come in when they affect that experience by extending it or diminishing it.

He felt constrained to make the point because of

> the tendency shown in recent years to look at literature through the glasses of an ideological preconception and to rate highest those authors whose attitude toward life is most in harmony with that of the critic. [This] seems to me to be regrettable . . .
>
> Literary criticism has its ethics, and it is the business of those who dislike the growth of the totalitarian mentality to resist the subjugation of art to dogma and to stand out for the free examination and enjoyment of the literary production of all races and ages. Art and literature are to be judged by broad humanist standards, or none at all.

It seems hardly possible that these words were written in the late 1940s, an era which —by contemporary standards—was a golden age of literary criticism. One can only hope Brenan would find the courage to write them again were he alive today.

The third great book Brenan wrote while in English exile (or perhaps began there and finished after his return to Spain in 1953) was *South from Granada*, an autobiographical account of his life in Yegen from 1919 to 1924. It is a kind of English travel book which tips its hat to the *costumbrista* tradition of Spanish

1 For some years the book was prohibited in Franco Spain, though a pirated edition printed in Mexico in 1946 circulated clandestinely, as did a proper Spanish-language edition produced in Paris by the émigré publishing house Ruedo Ibérico in 1962. In 1985 it was finally published in Spain by the Barcelona house of Plaza y Janes. Meanwhile, other editions had already appeared in Danish, Hebrew, Dutch, French, Serbo-Croat, and Italian.

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narrative. Gathorne-Hardy puts it a bit differently, comparing it to Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*. "It does not describe the reality of his time in Yegen," the biographer explains, at least as compared to his letters or accounts by other people at the time. "The food is much pleasanter. He leaves out most of his loneliness and despair, and all of his struggles to write and his love for Carrington—say, seventy percent of his preoccupations." [2] But these are minor points. *South from Granada* established Brenan as "the finest writer on Spain this century." Or, as Puig de la Bellacasa, the Spanish ambassador to the Court of Saint James, put it, "He knows us better than we know ourselves."

Like many writers, Brenan is best met on the printed page. But since this is a full-dress biography, we are not allowed the comforts of discretion. So for those who haven't read *A Personal Record*, here he is with all his warts. We learn, for example, that Brenan greatly mistreated his wife—so badly, in fact, that she was given to extended fits of melancholy and thoughts of suicide. (As early as 1938 she told a friend she thought she had wasted her life.) Part of the problem was sheer exploitation—her own literary career was put aside so she could act as his cook-housekeeper-typist (she also translated many of the poems which appear in *The Literature of the Spanish People*). But most of it was Brenan's tireless philandering, particularly with young girls—a passion which dogged him into extreme old age. The fact that few of these romances were technically consummated—a point which Gathorne-Hardy pedantically reminds us of at every turn—does not seem very mitigating to the casual reader. How much less so must it have seemed to Gamel Woolsey herself!

Moreover, as Brenan got older the problem got worse, exacerbated by the decision to return to Churriana in 1953, where young women, both English and Spanish, were an ever-present temptation. There was, to start with, what can only be called an incestuous relationship with his daughter, Miranda (by the servant Juliana), who lived with Brenan and Gamel in England from about age ten onwards. There was Carrington's niece Joanna, whose visit to Churriana drove Gamel to drink and distraction. Then there was Hetty MacGee, an American girl of a type apparently quite common among expatriate communities on Spain's southern coast during these years, who occupied most of Brenan's attentions during 1958-60 and peripherally from 1961 to 1964. (Her photo in the illustrations reminds one of Somerset Maugham's remark about the sexually promiscuous: a man can feast to his heart's content every night if he is willing to confine his appetite to mutton chops and turnip tops.)

By now Gamel took to spending every summer in England, where she struck up a friendship with the Catholic novelist (and closet lesbian) Honor Tracy. It was Tracy who apparently gave her back some sense of her own worth; at any event, Gamel now began to stand up to her husband instead of simply swallowing his abuse. For example, when he told her that he was taking Hetty on a trip to Morocco, her response was this: "Gerald, you don't have to give me *so many reasons* for going. If I had money and a suitable companion, I'd set out tomorrow for the sources of the Amazon." As it was, the trip was no lark: Brenan, already sixty-five, forced Hetty to hitchhike with him across Morocco, under insalubrious—and often extremely dangerous—conditions.

After their return, Hetty—always ahead of the cultural curve—switched from being a proto-hippie to a feminist, logically abandoning Brenan in the process. By now Gamel was a major alcoholic, consuming a bottle of spirits a day, plus a bottle of wine at each meal, and whiskey beforehand. Eventually her habit provoked hepatitis and a stroke, though in fact she was to die of cancer in 1968. While she suffered unspeakable agonies in the terminal phase, Brenan was

2 Ralph Partridge was particularly incensed at the distortions. "What I really objected to," he later wrote Brenan, "was your picture of yourself as a selfless angelic character anxious to do everything for us, when what really you were after was seducing my wife."

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busily putting in place her intended successor—a stunning young English poet by the name of Lynda Nicholson-Price.

According to Gathorne-Hardy, the sixteen years spent with Lynda were the happiest of Gerald's life. The two never married, and apparently never had sexual relations. Eventually he altered his will in her favor, in effect disinheriting his daughter. (To her credit, this was over the heated protests of Lynda herself.) There was one more book, *A Personal Record*, published in 1972. In 1978 Lynda married Lars Pranger, a Swedish painter, with whom she had several children. It was an odd *ménage*, though the Prangers treated Brenan selflessly, nursing him through operations, breakages, and endless bouts of flu and fever. When they could no longer cope, they placed him in as congenial a nursing home in England as they could find.

Characteristically, the circumstances redounded to Brenan's benefit. The Spanish press was soon full of stories (inspired by what sources Gathorne-Hardy does not tell us) that the heartless Lynda had exploited a helpless old man and then turned him out of his house. Eventually two young Andalusians kidnapped Brenan from the nursing home outside London and brought him back to Spain, where the local government gave him the house in which he lived out his remaining years. This final episode, as tasteless as it is, perhaps tells us less about Brenan than about the elite that took over control of Spanish cultural institutions during the Eighties—full of fantasies inherited from the generation of their defeated republican parents, such as the supposed evils of the capitalist mentality, particularly as practiced by "heartless" Anglo-Saxons.

Gerald Brenan is about not merely a particular writer but an entire circle of people, both British and American, who were able to spend large amounts of time in Spain and elsewhere in the Mediterranean during the interwar and postwar periods, either because of family money, the relative strength of the dollar and pound sterling, or the grinding poverty of Spanish society, which made

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places like Churriana relatively inexpensive for foreigners. Brenan must have had an excellent time of it in the late Fifties and early Sixties, acting as host to Hugh Trevor-Roper, Bertrand Russell, V. S. Pritchett, Augustus John, and Ernest Hemingway. These and others make interesting cameo appearances in the latter part of the book, and remind us that Brenan was appreciated by the best literary society in Britain and America even though he never became a "best-selling" writer.

With all due respect for the enormous work that went into this book, Brenan's place in literary history would have been better served instead by a collected edition of his writings, which would now include the journalism he did on Spain's transition to democracy for *The New York Review of Books*. The particular circumstances of his life seem less inspiring, at least in this telling, than the values that inspired his work. As he put it himself in the prologue to his history of Spanish literature, "the point of view from which I have written has been that of the person who reads literature for pleasure . . . All the efforts of critics are wasted unless they lead us back to an increased understanding and enjoyment of the originals." How revolutionary this sounds today, and how right! It moves one to hope that, one way or another, Gerald Brenan's voice has not been heard for the last time.

To Washington by moonbeam

John Frohnmayer Leaving Town Alive: Confessions of an Arts Warrior. Houghton Mifflin, 360 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Samuel Lipman

John Frohnmayer prefaces his new and surprisingly vengeful memoirs by telling the story of how he was fired as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts by Samuel Skinner, President Bush's chief of staff, on February 20, 1992. In true Frohnmayerian style, he puts it this way: "Skinner . . . canned my ass." But the book proper begins with a more idyllic story. It was three years earlier, on a lovely Sunday afternoon in February 1989, that Mr. Frohnmayer, a partner in a successful Oregon law firm, decided to become an active candidate for the chairmanship of the NEA, a post just made vacant by the departure of the then chairman, Frank Hodsoll, for presumably greener pastures at the Office of Management and Budget. True to the prevailing ethos of the Bush administration, Mr. Frohnmayer's decision was made while playing golf with his wife, Leah, at the Waverley Country Club, which, he writes, "lies lush and green on the banks of the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon." He quickly began to solicit support from his own acquaintances and from his brother Dave, then state attorney general and later a (losing) Republican candidate for governor in 1990.

Mr. Frohnmayer's qualifications for this difficult job were, if not exactly exiguous, hardly brilliant. He had been a member of the Oregon Arts Commission for eight years, and had been chairman of that parochial organization for four of those years. He had once entertained, but then given up, the idea of a professional singing career. He took his singing so seriously—he was wont to accompany himself on his "Uncle Lester's 1888 vintage Martin guitar"—that in seeking the position at the NEA he described himself to a White House official as "an artist in my own right." He also took an extensive interest in the legal problems of working artists.

The notion that Mr. Frohnmayer might be a contender for the chairmanship of the NEA, which he considered "the greatest job in the country," had first occurred to him in 1981, though it is unclear whether Mr. Frohnmayer was then a candidate in anyone's mind but his own. Something that is made clear in these memoirs is that Mr. Frohnmayer, throughout a privileged life of attendance at the best schools, found happiness—or, as it has increasingly become fashionable to call

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it, self-realization—difficult to achieve. He spent some time as a Stanford undergraduate in a pre-med program. From there, he "drifted into theology." He spent a year at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, and then attended the University of Chicago Divinity School, where he decided that theology was not for him (though he did stick around long enough to receive a master's degree in Christian ethics). So he returned to the family profession by attending Oregon Law School. After working in his father's law firm, he decided that "I did not love the law the way my father did." So he turned his attention to the arts, and by 1989 was so committed to his pursuit of the NEA chairmanship that when he was informed by the White House of the possibility of his nomination, he was, he writes, "literally leaping around the kitchen. I cannot recall another instance in my life of such enthusiasm. The job of which I had only dreamed, and Washington, and a life of indescribable excitement, were apparently ours." Later that summer, his picture, with an accompanying article in tribute, appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*.

By then, of course, the controversy over Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* and Robert Mapplethorpe's gritty photographs of sexual torture was in full swing, threatening to derail the stately march of NEA legislation through a mostly sympathetic Congress. By his own admission, Mr. Frohnmayer was dishonest about his intentions from the start of his discussions with the Bush administration. Here is Mr. Frohnmayer being interrogated, prior to his nomination, by Chase Untermeyer, the director of White House personnel:

> Chase cross-examined me for . . . twenty minutes, asking what I would do if the administration had a different point of view about a particular program or artist from mine. I told him that I would try my best to persuade the administration that my point of view was right, but that I was a team player, and if I failed to persuade, I would do the administration's will.
>
> In retrospect, I lied. In my heart of hearts, I knew that if I was ever pressed to the wall, I was not a team player.

There was also, perhaps, an even deeper misrepresentation involved: Mr. Frohnmayer tells us that, out of dislike for Dan Quayle, he did not even vote for George Bush in the 1988 election.

But at the time, these flyspecks on Mr. Frohnmayer's *bona fides* seemed unimportant. He received coaching for his confirmation hearings from the Washington public relations firm of Hill & Knowlton, where he was warned, incidentally, "to avoid Hilton Kramer." Mr. Frohnmayer was introduced to the committee by distinguished senators, and his progress through the Senate resembled a love-feast rather than an assessment of his qualifications.

But the Senate, and the arts advocates who hold the major media captive in these matters, are one thing; the real life of American art and the American people are quite another. Both of the latter were teeming with all the unsolved problems of society, including the relation of culture to public morality. Thus practically on the day of his accession to office in October 1989, Mr. Frohnmayer was greeted with the crisis posed by the Artists Space AIDS exhibition in New York, with its incendiary catalogue, in which quite frightful things were said, *inter alia*, about Cardinal O'Connor and the Catholic Church. On this grant and at that late date—the show was already being installed, and responsibility for it was hardly his—Mr. Frohnmayer waffled, first withdrawing NEA support, then confining NEA support to the show but not the catalogue. This behavior satisfied no one, not the religious Right, who saw in many NEA avant-garde grants the personification of the devil, nor the advocates of total artistic freedom, who felt that anything and everything validated by a panel of the artist's peers should be federally supported.

As crisis followed crisis at the NEA, Mr. Frohnmayer found himself delaying, and then finally rejecting, some of the more

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egregious performance-arts grants. But he supported *Poison*, a film that graphically depicts homosexual life in prison, as well as some poetry that treated the raping in the famous Central Park jogger case sympathetically. Sometimes he seemed to realize that the activities of the NEA were a political process, a part of democratic decision-making; sometimes he took an extreme pro-First Amendment stance. Indeed, by the end of his memoirs, he seems to be saying that no pro-First Amendment stance can be too extreme. It is clear from Mr. Frohnmayer's memoirs that neither the Serrano nor the Mapplethorpe grant really offended him in any way. As his tenure at the NEA lurched on, the White House tried to influence his behavior by getting him to appoint senior staff aides of their choosing. He discharged one of these aides, refused to hire another, and finally, toward the end of his tenure, accepted Anne-Imelda Radice, a Republican loyalist toward whom he soon took a dislike and viewed with mistrust.

Indeed, Mr. Frohnmayer's memoirs (and, one suspects, his whole outlook on life) come down to a division of the world into two kinds of people: those he knew and liked and brought with him from Portland, and those he met and disliked at the NEA and in Washington itself. The libertarian-conservative Representative Dana Rohrabacher is called a "meathead," the religious-conservative Senator Jesse Helms a "lizard," the moderately conservative Representative Tom Coleman "pissy." Mr. Frohnmayer never seems just to have let an NEA employee go, he always "fired" him. At Christmas 1989, he and his wife found themselves depressed by the state of the world—we were invading Panama, Eastern Europe was crumbling, etc.—so, as he writes, "Leah and I thought a good gospel choir would help us develop some Christmas spirit. We managed to wander into what I am sure is the only white Baptist church in Washington, with predictably disappointing results." He is also curiously selective in the names he mentions from the history of the NEA: there is no mention, for instance, of previous chairmen Nancy Hanks and Livingston Biddle, only cursory mention of his immediate predecessor Frank Hodsoll, and no mention at all of Ana Steele, one of the longest-serving NEA senior employees and the very epitome of faithfulness to the agency under all its leaders.

But all of this merely speaks of John Frohnmayer the man. It is vastly more important that this man, with all of his political naïveté, public pig-headedness, and personal insecurity, seems to have had no real understanding of art, no conception of the masterworks that were, in a sense, in the custody of the agency of which he was the chairman. As with so many people who don't have strong aesthetic or intellectual grounding, Mr. Frohnmayer seems to end up with the position that just about everything is or ought to be art. He seems able only to discuss the process of making art and never its content. Thus he writes:

> . . . it seemed to me that we had to persuade Congress that the United States could not prosper without creativity. The arts teach creativity: a poet makes sense out of chaos with a few inspired stanzas; a visual artist expresses what others see but cannot organize; an architect confronts us with new forms; a folk artist makes the most commonsense utensil beautiful or fanciful. The artist's genius is to shake us out of complacency and allow us new vision. A democracy, particularly one that wants to be economically competitive, must have such dreamers, thinkers, and doers.

Later, in discussing the congressional opposition to the NEA, he states:

> Instead of praising the arts as a stimulus for economic growth (in sales and exports of books, recordings, movies, TV), as an integral part of education (teaching risk-taking, self-evaluation, and written, oral, and visual expression), and as a significant force in community building (encouraging tolerance, common goals, participatory projects), all they could envision was the two-second sound bite "My opponent voted for pornography."

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Nor did he understand politics any more than he understood art. At every turn in his memoirs, Mr. Frohnmayer expresses a deep dissatisfaction with the life of politics. He writes, "I understand but cannot embrace politics." But the only evidence he offers of his grasp of politics is a complaint that there was more money available for the Gulf War than for, of all things, opera!

One believes Mr. Frohnmayer when he says that he had a terrible time in Washington—though curiously, despite his book's title, *Leaving Town Alive*, he has stayed on in the nation's capital. Nothing that he looked forward to in terms of pleasure, excitement, and diversion, panned out. He couldn't continue his attempts at singing, because of unfavorable press coverage; he didn't have time to play golf; his only amusement was rowing every morning before going to work.

Indeed, on the evidence of his memoirs, all his life Mr. Frohnmayer has been living on a moonbeam. He is plainly a character marked by intense yearning; it is his personal tragedy that he could not find the fulfillment in Washington that he had failed to find earlier. So far as his term at the NEA was concerned, however, and the public function he was supposed to serve, there can be little doubt that he left the agency in much worse shape than he found it.

Nature's design

Henry D. Thoreau Faith in a Seed:
"The Dispersion of Seeds"
& Other Late Natural History Writings.
Edited by Bradley P. Dean.
Foreword by Gary Paul Nabhan.
Introduction by Robert D. Richardson, Jr.
Shearwater Books/Island Press,
283 pages, $25

reviewed by Guy Davenport

Since Thoreau's death in 1862, at age forty-five, his writing unpublished in his lifetime has found its way into print with a steady, if widely spaced, regularity. *Excursions* came out in 1863; *The Maine Woods* in 1864; *Cape Cod* in 1865; and *A Yankee in Canada* in 1866. These were all collections of magazine pieces, and were books only in the sense that they were related texts brought together under a publisher's title. *Poems of Nature* appeared in 1895. A *Collected Poems*, edited by Carl Bode, came out in 1941, followed by a second, enlarged edition in 1965. 1906 saw the publication, in fourteen handsome volumes, of his *Journal*, to which Perry Miller added a fifteenth volume in 1958. Alexander C. Kern published two more journal entries, newly discovered, in 1968.

There are thousands of unpublished pages of Thoreau in libraries around the country. This new "book" by Thoreau is a deciphering of a manuscript that was clearly meant to be the work that would follow *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and *Walden* (1854). Thoreau's method of composition was to draft passages daily in his journal, often at the point of observation, writing with an implement he and his father invented, the lead pencil exactly as we have it now (a stem of ground graphite and clay encased in a cedarwood tube). These journal entries then became the source of his books. There was an intermediary stage of redrafting, polishing, and elaborating, on any handy sheet of paper or back of an envelope. *He* would know how to piece it all together for a fair copy, but it took Bradley P. Dean ten years to find the continuities and to come up with this text of "The Dispersion of Seeds," now printed for the first time, together with three other fragments, "Wild Fruits," "Weeds and Grasses," and "Forest Trees." These studies, taken with others like them gathered by Robert Sattelmeyer in 1980 as *The Natural History Essays*, constitute a substantial body of scientific writing from a classic American author whose reputation as a prose stylist, an eloquently independent spirit, and a philosopher in the mode of the Greek Cynics and the Roman Stoics has not until now included scientific inquiry.

What "The Dispersion of Seeds" establishes is that Thoreau was inventing the study we

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now call ecology—how nature keeps house. In France at the same time that Thoreau was plotting how individual trees have their seeds distributed by squirrels, birds, wind, snow, rain, and a free ride on human trousers and skirts, Louis Pasteur was disproving the age-old belief in spontaneous generation.

Even though the introduction by Robert D. Richardson, Jr., places this text historically and biographically, showing how it reflects Thoreau's acceptance of *On the Origin of Species* over his allegiance to Louis Agassiz's theory of repeated cataclysms and geneses, there is a deeper dimension to Thoreau's text. At the center of his detective work is Thoreau's observation that pine seedlings thrive best in stands of oak, and vice versa: exactly the opposite of what one would expect. Thoreau sees in this a cunning arrangement whereby if an oak forest goes down to a forest fire or the axe, a pine forest is there ready to replace it. But he does not have the knowledge of soil chemistry to account for why pine seedlings fare better among oaks than near their parent trees. It was in the reforestation of Jutland that the Danes discovered that the mountain pine (*Pinus montana*) seemed to be dependent on the proximity of spruce (*Pica alba*), neither of which grew into healthy trees without the other. A Colonel E. Delgar established this mutuality as a principle, and thus reforested large areas of a country that was being taken over by sand dunes. I suspect that Thoreau had discovered a similar relationship of interdependency far ahead of botany's ability to account for it.

The fascination this text holds for us is precisely Thoreau's detective work in finding out how squirrels disperse seeds by making their winter store, and how birds drop part of their dinner, how winter wind sails seeds across snow, how "parachute seeds" ride the air. (The phrase is startling until we realize that we are in the age of ballooning, and thus of parachutes, long before the airplane.) Sherlock Holmes, we remember, invoked Thoreau in the matter of circumstantial evidence, "as when we find a trout in the milk." In the square mile around Walden Pond (on property belonging to Emerson) Thoreau set out to account for every plant, animal, and insect. He was a diligent scholar (able to read German, Italian, and French, and he knew the classical writers on nature in Greek and Latin). His "faith in a seed" is his constant wonder at nature's abundant fecundity, and in nature's seeming intelligence in providing for survival. Seeds are wily and determined. (In my own backyard in Kentucky I have a hardy stand of licorice which rode over here from the Bois de Boulogne, its seed being designed to hook onto passing foxes, cats, and blue jeans.) The soles of shoes are rich in pollen and seeds. Botanists now know that the coconut palms of Central America derive from islands in the Indian ocean: coconuts float. We see Thoreau running along roads to trace milkweed in the summer air to its source miles away. He digs up squirrel hoards (carefully replacing them) and traces the route they were carried. He knows that inefficient digestive systems pass seeds through birds and horses. An oak forest is the diligent work, always, of animals.

"Nature's design" is a recurring phrase. *On the Origin of Species* begins with the phenomenon of dispersal, Darwin's "distribution," which scientists like von Humboldt, Linnaeus, Wallace, and many others had been studying for a century. Darwin, whom Thoreau had just discovered (a friend of Asa Gray's had brought an *Origin* out to Concord) introduced the theme of struggle into natural history. Everything is programmed to take over the earth, and has the fecundity to succeed, except that rival species check its omnidirectional radiance. Thoreau the transcendentalist, like Agassiz the special creationist, saw an "intelligence" in nature. Agassiz thought it was divine; Thoreau wasn't so sure. Accident, trial-and-error, and the stupidity of human beings played too large a part in the order, or disorder, of things. Samuel Butler's "luck and cunning" better states nature's strategies.

Inventor and manufacturer of the lead pencil (and of raisin bread), handyman to Emerson and Hawthorne, a Pied Piper to all the

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local children, Thoreau was by profession, when anybody could get him to work, the local land surveyor, defining boundaries, drawing up plats, knowing every inch of Concord real estate. Ironist that he was, he must have mused on the pun the title surveyor made. His real surveying of the processes of nature was at odds with what he saw as exploitation, bad soil management, and an unworthy husbandry of the land. The very modern note on which "The Dispersion of Seeds" ends (or pauses) is a plea for forest wardens and agronomists to control despoliation.

Walden was concerned with a pond in a wood, and with the seasons; *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, written at the same time as *Walden*, is about rivers and water meadows. Both are meditations on what to do with our lives. *Faith in a Seed* has none of the philosophical agenda of his other work. It is science. But it is also one of the most beautiful texts in American writing, for Thoreau's eye is as lively as a squirrel, and his descriptions are beautiful not because he is out to write poetic prose but because they are accurate and meticulously responsible as to information. Here, from "Wild Fruits," is a typical passage:

> I remember years ago breaking through a thick oak wood east of the Great Fields and descending into a long, narrow, and winding blueberry swamp which I did not know existed there. A deep, withdrawn meadow sunk low amid the forest, filled with green waving sedge three feet high, and low andromeda, and hardhack, for the most part dry to the feet then, though with a bottom of unfathomed mud, not penetrable except in midsummer or midwinter, and with no print of man or beast in it that I could detect.

I count sixteen distinct facts in this passage, and it goes on, until we are looking at the god Pan surveying his realm.

Thoreau's own accomplished eye is supplemented by his scholarly research into many authors ancient and recent, giving the text the richness of Montaigne's in both the breadth of reference and the jump of wit. Early readers of Thoreau's journals complained that they become increasingly technical and dull, lacking the epigrammatic pronouncements that rivaled Emerson's and Carlyle's. He had become terribly serious about how a rise in the ground can cause pine seedlings to grow in a line along it, and about the timing of florescences, migrations, and the seasons.

If "The Dispersion of Seeds" had been published soon after Thoreau's death, it would not have modified his reputation a great deal. He had published smaller studies like this one, on wild apples, and even on the succession of forest trees. John Burroughs and other naturalists who were working in the same direction are largely forgotten. Coming into print 125 years late, and as a masterly reconstruction from drafts which Professor Dean had to spend a decade fitting together, it is not only a timely reminder of Thoreau's genius but a vindication of his stature as a naturalist.

Far & away

Mark Cocker Loneliness and Time: The Story of British Travel Writing. Pantheon, 294 pages, $23

reviewed by Alan Rutenberg

In *War and Peace* Tolstoy offers this description of Pierre Bezuhov imprisoned by the French army: "Here and now for the first time in his life Pierre fully appreciated the enjoyment of eating because he was hungry, of drinking because he was thirsty, of sleep because he was sleepy, of warmth because he was cold, of talking to a fellow creature because he felt like talking and wanted to hear a human voice."

Compare Wilfred Thesiger, the great twentieth-century British Arabist and desert traveler, as he traversed the Empty Quarter of the Arabian desert in the late 1940s: "I had learnt the satisfaction which comes from hardship and the pleasure which springs

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from abstinence: the contentment of a full belly; the richness of meat; the taste of clean water; the ecstasy of surrender when the craving for sleep becomes a torment; the warmth of a fire in the chill of dawn." While Thesiger acknowledges that his supplies in the desert included *War and Peace*, along with a volume of Gibbon, the similarity in these two passages is not primarily a matter of literary imitation. Rather these are complementary images of Rousseau's dream: confinement in a "happy prison" and necessity in the desert are both conditions free from the alleged corruption of civilization.

Wilfred Thesiger is the central figure in Mark Cocker's informative study of British travel writing in the twentieth century. Mr. Cocker, a young English biographer and reviewer of travel books for the *Daily Telegraph*, has many of the virtues and few of the infelicities of the enthusiast. He writes with admirable balance, earnest thoroughness, but alas, insufficient grace: he is a persistent devotee of the word "lifestyle."

Mr. Cocker's implicit intention in *Loneliness and Time* is to provide an alternate view of twentieth-century British travel writing to the one neatly summarized in Paul Fussell's *Abroad*, a study of British literary travelers between the wars. Mr. Fussell writes: "There seems something uniquely British here, in this ability to spot anomalies and make a travel book by accumulating a great number of them. . . . [I]t is an unquestioned understanding of the norm and an unapologetic loyalty to it that underlies the perceptual and expressive techniques of the British travel book." Discussing the travel writing of Evelyn Waugh, Mr. Fussell claims: "Like Bertrand Russell in a way, Waugh is a hero of British skepticism and empiricism, and although his vision is social and comic, his perception of the norms implied by anomalies must be said to be, at its best, philosophical."

Mr. Cocker identifies instead a distinctive romantic tradition in twentieth-century British travel writing, and this tradition provides a quite different conception of the heroic traveler. His journey has an intellectual and spiritual grandeur without connection to the ironies of norms and anomalies. This heroic traveler, exemplified by Wilfred Thesiger, is descended from a golden age of imperial explorers. He is dissatisfied with modern European civilization and in search of the exotic and primitive. Among his predecessors are artists such as Delacroix, who found important subjects in North Africa, and Gauguin, who found his central ones in Tahiti. Perhaps best described as an anti-modern traveler, his characteristic vision is intensely private and intellectually serious. His dissatisfaction with modern European civilization is not allied with the politics of the Right in the 1930s, or with the culture of the Left in the 1960s. He demonstrates, in effect, that Erich Heller's famous essay on romanticism, "The Artist's Journey Into the Interior," applies to literal, terrestrial travelers as well. Portraits of these anti-modern travelers form the substance of Mr. Cocker's narrative. While these portraits are not equally compelling, each illustrates the pursuit of high, romantic ideals in twentieth-century British travel writing.

Mr. Cocker describes Wilfred Thesiger as "a kind of fulcrum in twentieth-century travel." Preceding him as a British Arabist was an extraordinary man with the apposite name Harry St. John Bridger Philby. He was an important explorer: in 1917 he became the first European for a hundred years to cross Arabia from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, and in 1932 he became an international celebrity as only the second European ever to explore the vast desert in southern Arabia known as the Empty Quarter. Philby therefore partially resembles the Asian traveler Eric Bailey, whom Mr. Cocker calls the last representative of the Victorian enterprise of scientific and geographical exploration.

Philby did not share the nationalist impulse of the Victorians, nor apparently did his notorious son Kim, who later became, so to say, a permanent tourist in the Soviet Union. Philby wrote: "My chief aim [is] to secure the immortality to be gained by the accomplishment of some great work." In

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Arabia he cultivated a close friendship with the eventual ruler, King Abd' al Aziz ibn Saud, while in England his influential friends included John Maynard Keynes and E. M. Forster. According to Mr. Cocker, Philby's accounts of his travels are not especially rewarding, but are notable for his emphasis on rebellion and ambition—traits inherited, it would appear, by his son. Mr. Cocker writes: "In his hunger for power and fame, in his persistent need to speak his mind whether to Briton or Arab, in his ultimate lack of allegiance, except to a highly personal version of reality, one senses a figure of almost Faustian proportions."

Wilfred Thesiger is the successor to Philby among the British Arabists, but he was a traveler of a quite different order. His own journeys across the Empty Quarter of Arabia in the late 1940s were motivated mainly by a desire for a personal experience available only to the explorer-traveler. Born in 1910, Thesiger spent his boyhood in Abyssinia, where his father was the British Minister and where he developed, in his words, "a lifelong craving for barbaric splendor, for savagery and color and the throb of drums, and . . . a lasting veneration for long-established custom and ritual." While Thesiger himself displays an entirely honorable sense of individual human dignity, this passage has ominous affinities with the fascist aesthetics of Leni Riefenstahl, and points to the darker implications of the anti-modern view. Mr. Cocker is only moderately attentive to these matters.

Mr. Cocker describes *Arabian Sands*, Thesiger's austere account of his two journeys across the Empty Quarter, as "a quest for and celebration of both the masculine severity and atavistic pleasures of the pagan world." In *Arabian Sands* Thesiger wrote:

> For years the Empty Quarter had represented to me the final, unattainable challenge which the desert offered. . . . Now I had crossed it. To others my journey would have little importance. It would produce nothing except a rather inaccurate map which no one was ever likely to use. It was a personal experience, and the reward had been a drink of clean, nearly tasteless water. I was content with that.

Thesiger regretted the consequences of imperial exploration, and, with some asperity, he revered the ancient tribal forms of life. "I craved the past, resented the present and dreaded the future," he wrote. Mr. Cocker describes him both as the "last witness to a vanishing golden age" and, in contrast to the earlier imperial explorers, as "one of the first in a line of generous, sympathetic travelers who are also writers of great ability."

Such travelers include the South African novelist and travel writer Laurens van der Post, who pursues the anti-modern theme with the assistance of Jungian psychology. Van der Post identifies the crisis in the European spirit and the colonial state with the dominance of the rational and masculine aspects of experience, and proposes, as a remedy to this psychological and political crisis, attention to the irrational and the feminine in African primitive cultures. In several books which describe his travels among the primitive cultures of postwar colonial Africa, the best-known of which has the representative title *Venture to the Interior*, van der Post applies this schematic vision. Mr. Cocker, with characteristic balance, is critical of the distortions which result, but he also appreciates van der Post's seriousness of purpose, noting that "his alternative vision, the vital corrective for the fatherland's errors, provoked a deeply hostile reaction in his compatriots."

Another writer in this critical mode is Gavin Maxwell, of whom Mr. Cocker writes: "As a literary interpreter of British wildlife and landscape he probably has few equals this century." In a series of books including the immensely popular *Ring of Bright Water*, Maxwell describes northwest Scotland as "a remote Elysium" that permits a rebirth of innocence. In Maxwell's anti-modern vision, which almost literally repeats the vocabulary of Rousseau, this part of Scotland represents a world before the fall, free "from the prison of over-dense communities" and the "incarceration of office walls and hours." While the

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popular psychological and environmental literature of recent decades has eviscerated the serious thought of Jung and Rousseau, these writers influenced van der Post and Maxwell in that most fruitful period of anti-modern travel, after the Second World War but before the 1960s.

The great successor of Wilfred Thesiger in the line of "travelers who are also writers with great ability" is, according to Mr. Cocker, the travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor. Mr. Cocker describes Fermor as "the Sir Philip Sidney of his age" and "the travel book's great stylist." *Mani*, Fermor's account of his travels in the southernmost Peloponnese, is in Mr. Cocker's opinion "as near to perfection as a travel book has come." In *Mani*, Fermor writes of his travels in Greece: "These private invasions of Greece . . . are directed at the least frequented regions, often the hardest of access and the least inviting to most travelers, for it is here that what I am in search of is to be found." Fermor explains that his aim "is to situate and describe present-day Greeks of the mountains and the islands in relationship to their habitat and their history; to seek them out in those regions where bad communications and remoteness have left this ancient relationship, comparatively speaking, undisturbed."

The anti-modern traveler often combines aspects of the active and the contemplative life, and in the soldier-aesthete Fermor, who was a hero in World War II, one encounters impressive accomplishment in both spheres. During the war Fermor played a key role in kidnapping a German general in occupied Greece. Mr. Cocker writes: "The kidnap probably has few contenders as the war's most daring episode." Fermor also deserves attention as a prose stylist. A mandarin and mannerist, memoirist and historian, Fermor, one discovers, writes a lush and elaborate descriptive prose which often turns travel writing into personal reverie or historical fantasy. Even a sentence on quotidian matters has a lovely ping: "Plying my forefinger like a strigil to wipe the salty sweat off my face, I felt it rasp against three days' unmown stubble." The use of the antiquated word "strigil," a curved instrument for performing precisely the task indicated, is in its way a nice anti-modern gesture.

In the summer of 1956 Wilfred Thesiger had a chance encounter in Afghanistan with the highly regarded British travel writer Eric Newby. Mr. Cocker describes this meeting as "a symbolic moment of contact between the waning golden age of exploration and the silver age of travel." In his book *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, Newby offers an amusing account of this meeting, demonstrating a whimsical sense of irony and self-mockery which distances him from Thesiger and from any connection with the great explorers of the past. One suspects it is not tourism that now most threatens the vocation of the anti-modern traveler. It is rather the multiplication of self-conscious ironies such as Newby's, without his delightful humor and whimsy. Among Mr. Cocker's anti-modern travelers, irony does not travel at all well.

Top of the 11th, top of the order

Donald Hall
The Museum of Clear Ideas.
Ticknor & Fields, 120 pages, $18.95

reviewed by Richard Tillinghast

"The task and potential greatness of mortals," in the words of Hannah Arendt as quoted by Donald Hall at the beginning of his eleventh book of poems, *The Museum of Clear Ideas*, "reside in their ability to produce things which are at home in everlastingness." Hall's strategy for being "at home in everlastingness" organizes itself around three emphases: a seven-page elegy for a fictitious poet of our time named Bill Trout; a long, nine-part poem called "Baseball," the sections of which are innings, written in nine-syllable lines; and the long title sequence, an *omnium gatherum* modeled after Horace's odes. There is in addition a reprise of "Baseball" called "Extra Innings."

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Being a particularly trusting reader, the first time I read "Another Elegy" I missed Hall's broad hint, delivered in the form of an epigraph from T. S. Eliot: "Both one and many; in the brown baked features/ The eyes of a familiar compound ghost . . ." But I'm glad I was credulous enough to read the poem at least once under the impression that Bill Trout was a real person—or at least wondering which real-life poet Hall had in mind when he was imagining the character.

My credulity was not badly misplaced, because in Bill Trout, Hall has sketched a composite picture of his generation of poets. In the pastiche of a biographical sketch from "*The Norton Anthology of Contemporary Verse*" that Hall has appended in his notes to the book, Trout's dates are 1927-1977: born in the same year as John Ashbery, Galway Kinnell, W. S. Merwin, and James Wright; one year later than A. R. Ammons, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, and Frank O'Hara; and a year before Philip Levine and Donald Hall. Trout is a poet from the heartland: "Idaho made him," Hall writes, tongue gleefully in cheek, "Pocatello of hobos and freight-yards—/ clangor of iron, fetor of coalsmoke." His literary beginnings are those of the homegrown American verse-maker: "When he was fifteen he stayed home from fishing to number/ feet that promenaded to a Union Pacific tune, ABAB/ pentameters."

His excesses and troubles are those of midcentury American poets like Lowell, Schwartz, and Berryman: madness, divorce, and alcoholism. As the parody blurb puts it, "Trout led a troubled life, more like the generation of his teachers than his own generation." The genius of the fictional portrait lies in the familiarity of the generic story: "he drank two Guggenheims and snorted/ an NEA." Hall deftly sketches scenes that give the story its verisimilitude. The tone and the vocabulary epitomize the period. At a reunion of old friends in the Sixties, Bill, recently divorced, "paced/ muttering, smoking his Lucky Strikes. Later the rest/ divorced and paced."

Typically, it is on the quintessentially American occasion of families gathering for a camping and fishing trip—"setting up tents, joking, frying pickerel in cool dusk"—that Trout must spoil the idyll with his bathetic animadversions on existence: "Continually sloshed, Bill proclaimed/ that life was shit, death was shit—even *shit* was *shit*." Hall does not answer the often-posed question why the writers of our time—particularly the poets—have led lives of excess, breakdown, and despair. Finally, though, amidst the wreckage and dreck of the generic poet's life, Hall celebrates and marvels at the irreducible calculus of hard work and dedication of a writer's life:

> Bill Trout
> woke up, the best mornings of his life—
> without debilities
> of hangover, without pills or panic—to practice
> joy
> at four o'clock dawn: to test words, to break
> them down
> and build again, patient to construct immovable
> objects
> of art by the pains of intelligent attention—
> remaining
> alert or awake to nightmare.

Donald Hall is our finest elegist. He has, over the years, come to a vision of life not as something that begins and then ends, but as a recurrence, a seasonal reprise: "Bill Trout is incorrigible, like the recidivist blacksnake,/ sparrow, and high water that turn and return in April's/ versions—cycles of the same, fish making fish . . ."

A man of letters and jack-of-all-trades whose industry and catholicity have astounded the literary world for decades, Hall, author of—among many others—a prose book about baseball called *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons*, is well-known as a sports fan, specifically a baseball fan. One pictures him in his rural New Hampshire home scanning the airwaves with his satellite dish in search of games to watch:

> Baseball is not my work. It is my
> walk in the park, my pint of bitter,

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my Agatha Christie or Zane Grey—
release of the baby animal's
energy into the jungle gym
of a frivolous concentration.
Also I dictate letters between
pitches—as I observe the Red Sox
or whatever game's on satellite.

(Notice the nine lines, and the nine syllables per line.)

The long poem "Baseball" is couched as an attempt to explain the game to the late German collage-artist Kurt Schwitters. Not surprisingly, collage is Hall's approach here:

The madness method
of "Baseball" gathers bits and pieces

of ordinary things—like bleacher
ticket stubs, used Astroturf, Fenway
Frank wrappers, yearbooks, and memory—
to paste them onto the bonkers grid
of the page.

Surprisingly, the poem is not nearly so much about baseball as it is about a dozen other strands of the poet's life: walking the dog, causeries on this and that, memories—only some of them tied to baseball. It is, not least, a frankly and enjoyably erotic poem:

Baseball, I warrant, is not the whole
occupation of the aging boy.
Far from it: There are cats and roses;
there is her water body. She fills
the skin of her legs up, like water;
under her blouse, water assembles,
swelling lukewarm; her mouth is water,
her cheekbones cool water; water flows
in her rapid hair . . .

Listening to a baseball game on the radio a few days ago, I had a little epiphany about this poem. Then a piece in *The New York Times Book Review* by Robert Pinsky on Phil Rizzuto's *O Holy Cow!* gave words to my insight. The reason "Baseball" dwells so little on the actual game is that our involvement with the game, like Phil Rizzuto's commentary on Yankees games, "embodies," in Pinsky's words, "the divided, sometimes wandering attention, the ebbing and flowing alertness, the genial state of all-but-suspended consciousness that have made the sound of broadcast baseball a beloved national pacifier."

Hall's "Museum of Clear Ideas" gives us a taste of what our moment in time looks like through the eyes, not—as it is often presented to us—of the TV-sitcom writer or the newspaper columnist, but of the sharp and even bitter satirist this poet can be. One gets a sense of how a contemporary Horace, who calls himself after a Disney character, Horace Horsecollar, would have approached our follies: the sequence is loosely modeled on Horace's odes—so loosely, in fact, that a comparison with the originals yields very little. Stanza 1 of the twenty-second of Horace's first book of odes,

Integer vitae scelerisque purus
non eget Mauris iaculis neque arcu
nec venenatis gravida sagittis,
Fusce, pharetra . . .

(in Burton Raffel's version, "Fuscus, an honest man,/ A man without guilt,/ Needs no Moorish spears,/ No poisoned arrows . . ."), goes like this in Hall's rendering:

Flaccus, drive up from Providence to see us.
I'll buy some bargain Scotch at a New
Hampshire
liquor store and we'll celebrate your new book
and that good review

in the *New York Times* . . .

In short, the Horatian Odes simply suggest an attitude toward, and provide occasions for commentary on, the life Hall sees going on around him. For readers familiar with the Odes, though, there are a few in-jokes. Hall has fun with 1, 10, which Raffel translates

Mercury, Atlantis' eloquent grandson,
You who civilized savage man with language,

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Whose wisdom created the sandy wrestling-
ground
And gave men that gift,

by celebrating a different brand of Mercury:

Mercury, descendant of Henry Ford's five-
dollar-a-day Model-T factory line,
you educated us and provided means
of exploration . . .

The automobile becomes "messenger of adult pleasures" and also awaits us at the end of our life's journey: "Oh, surely your transport will return again/ in the procession of motors following/ a sable Lincoln."

Donald Hall is interested in the generic life. Not every poet is. Reading lines like "When the young husband picked up his friend's pretty wife/ in the taxi one block from her townhouse for their/ first lunch together, in a hotel dining room," one may be reminded of a fiction writer like John Updike or John Cheever. Whitman's enumerations, though, give us a similar sense of the generic American life in his time:

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,
The carpenter dresses his plank . . .
The duck-shooter walks by cautious and silent
stretches,
The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands
at the altar . . .
The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-
gallery with half-shut eyes bent sideways . . .
The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet
bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck. . . .
The President holding a cabinet council is
surrounded by the great secretaries.

Returning to "the young husband," Hall can sound quite the severe moralist:

the first
kiss with open mouths, nakedness, swoon,
thrust-and-catch;
endorphins followed by endearments; a brief
nap;
another fit; restoration

of clothes, arrangements for another
encounter,
the taxi back, and the furtive kiss of goodbye.
Then, by turn: tears, treachery, anger,
betrayal;
marriages and houses destroyed . . .

Horsecollar has another string to his bow, however. Following almost all his odes are rejoinders which a note tells us "lack an Horatian provenance." These strike a cynical attitude that undercuts the pathos of the odes themselves: "Or say, Why this whining? You liked/ your nooky well enough, back when/ you had your teeth."

Do you croon guilt's anthem now
—after twenty years of diligence
and a gold watch—because your bald
agent retires from the company?

At one time seemingly lost in the crowd of gifted American poets from the celebrated "generation of '27," Donald Hall has persisted and persevered, with the result that his poetry, rather than standing among, now stands out. Having resigned a professorship at the University of Michigan in 1975, he has provided an example of the poet as man of letters: essayist, editor, literary journalist, sports writer, author of children's books, critic, Dutch uncle to a generation of poets, and surely the most prolific letter-writer of his time. The remarkable thing is that, distinguished a figure as he is, Hall has managed to avoid making himself into a monument. *The Museum of Clear Ideas* is as original, idiosyncratic, and un-museumlike a poetic work as we are likely to see for a long time to come.

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Letters

Peter Singer

To the Editors:
Jenny Teichman is a respected philosopher; *The New Criterion* is a respected journal. How could the one come to write and the other to print her philippic "The False Philosophy of Peter Singer" (April 1993)? Teichman misunderstands Singer's complaint. Worse, she misunderstands academic freedom and freedom of speech. Singer claims no right to be invited to speak anywhere. What he claims are the rights to be allowed to speak without disruption when invited, not to be disinvited after invitation because of threats of disruption, and the right not to fail to be invited because of the same threat. And Singer rightly claims more: that his book *Practical Ethics* not be withdrawn from courses and that advertised chairs not lose their funding because of threats.

Teichman's argument rests on a monstrous premise: that people who dislike a view and who are in no position to publish rebuttals because they are not academics may, in lieu of rebuttal, physically prevent a speaker from speaking and his book from being taught. This premise is blind to academic freedom. It is also dangerous, for it is liable to turn upon those who wield it. Who does not have some view that others despise? Whose views would be safe if Teichman's premise were accepted?

The question is not the defense of Singer's views. He's quite capable of defending them himself when allowed. The issue is very much Singer's and our right to hold and express our views whether or not others agree with them. I do not know Singer; but I know his writings and have taught his book from time to time. I agree with some, but by no means all, that he there says. One could use his book to advance his views if so inclined, or to illustrate a very clear analysis of certain problems, or even as a *reductio* of the sort of utilitarian views he holds.

As Plato noted some time ago, an author loses control of his thought once he publishes it in writing. Singer cannot prevent us from making what we will of his writings. On that account, and for our own sakes as well as his, perhaps for the sake of the political health of those universities that seek to silence him, we should speak out against them and in support of his right to be heard even when, especially when, we do not agree with him.

My admiration for the editors and the publisher of *The New Criterion* is finite but unbounded. I learn something new from each issue. This time, however, I think they might learn something from me.

Barry R. Gross
Treasurer, National Association of Scholars
& Professor of Philosophy,
York College, City University of New York

To the Editors:
I do not share Peter Singer's views on many matters. But Jenny Teichman's attack on him left me troubled. She notes that those who disagree with Singer are entitled not to invite him to lecture, to stay away, or to peacefully picket. But, she adds, "it is probably all right, in extreme cases, to try

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to silence it [Singer's philosophy] in other ways." She quotes Singer complaining that his lectures in Germany have been disrupted, that he is unable to lecture there even when invited. She defends the treatment against which Singer complains by suggesting that "since refutation might not do the trick mass demonstrations might well be more effective." Indeed. Does that justify mass demonstrations to disrupt or silence Singer's lectures? Refuting him "might not do the trick." But in a free country, such as Germany, printed refutations are always possible, even though they "might not do the trick." Surely the *argumentum ad baculum* is not justifiable here.

If Singer were a demagogue, attempting to inveigle people to action by appealing to their emotions in non-rational ways, mass demonstrations might be justified. But he merely expounds a philosophy (abhorrent to Teichman) by means of a quite rational discourse, addressed largely to academic audiences. Teichman's suggestion to silence Singer "in other ways" seems no less abhorrent than the doctrines it is meant to silence.

Ernest van den Haag
New York, N.Y.

Jenny Teichman replies:

I couldn't help smiling at Mr. Gross's criticisms. He begins his letter with the rhetorical question "How could [*The New Criterion*] print her philippic?" and ends it by telling the Editors to follow his advice and not print any such stuff again. In a way his words echo some of mine in the April *New Criterion*, viz: "It is probably all right, in extreme cases, to try to silence [false philosophy]," though unlike me Mr. Gross does not say "probably" or "in extreme cases." Moreover, whereas my expression "in extreme cases" refers not to philosophical methods but to social circumstances (see below), Mr. Gross's word "philippic" carries a different implication.

It is clear that his repressiveness exceeds my own, yet he feels quite comfortable about saying: ". . . she misunderstands freedom of speech."

Alas! He offers me no enlightenment on this important subject; I can find no definition, analysis, or explanation of academic freedom in his letter. Unless perhaps the things said about invitations are intended to explicate the concept? Mr. Gross is certainly keen to emphasize the importance of invitations. He seems to think they resemble legally binding contracts, the laws in question being those of the Medes and the Persians. But in elevating the significance of invitations he degrades the idea of academic freedom. The notion of an invitation is important for a proper understanding of dinner parties but throws very little light on free speech.

Mention of knee-jerks is itself something of a knee-jerk, yet I can't think of any better word to describe the way in which Messrs. Gross and van den Haag have seized on the first sentence of my paper. All the rest of it seems to have gone in one eye and out the other. Thus they take no notice of the distinction drawn between the natural right to free speech and the special right of access to a public platform. They ignore the implication that the silencing of Singer would be OK only if it took the form of refusing him such access. They ignore the reminder that in real life not having access to a public platform is the fate of most of the public anyway. They ignore the idea that freedom of expression can be exercised in more than one way. They ignore the idea that pickets and demonstrations are or can be legitimate exercises of that freedom. My claim that Singer puts all his ethical eggs in one basket, and as a result might be more affected by the sight of cripples outside a conference hall than by reasoned refutations, is seen by Mr. van den Haag as *argumentum ad baculum*. In reality it is nothing more than an application of the familiar proverb "one picture is worth a thousand words."

It seems to me that Messrs. Gross and van den Haag have gone charging into battle against an opponent who doesn't exist. And I rather fear that the more I say the further their jerky knees will carry them into an illusory war. Still, here goes.

Let's give a little thought to "extreme-case" social circumstances.

The people who protested about Singer's proposed lectures did so because they perceived a similarity between his philosophy and Nazi theories. And there is indeed a similarity. I produced evidence for it in my April paper. Briefly: both Singerism and Nazism favor "euthanasia," both deny that human beings *qua* human beings have a right to life, both claim that it is all right, or good, to kill certain types of human beings.

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Messrs. Gross and van den Haag do not give any reasonings relating to the important substantive question, which is: Are there any circumstances in which false theories should be refused a public platform? They just assume that the answer must be No.

My own reply to this tricky question, of course, is that "in extreme cases" the answer is "probably" Yes. I came to this opinion partly because I knew that postwar German lawmakers, and their successors, accepted, and still accept, that their country's history has produced an "extreme case." Lots of other people think so too.

Article 5 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany reads: "Everyone shall have the right freely to express and disseminate his opinion by speech, writing, and pictures . . . Art and science, research and teaching, shall be free." But Article 18 adds: "Whoever abuses freedom of expression of opinion, in particular freedom of the press [and] freedom of teaching . . . shall forfeit these basic rights."

The interpretation of academic freedom embodied in these provisions enables German governments to outlaw anti-Semitic and other racist propaganda. Within the last few years, according to news reports, certain visiting speakers, some of them academics and all of them clutching their invitation cards, have been prevented from addressing public meetings, not by groups of German citizens but by the German state itself. Now it may be that Messrs. Gross and van den Haag think there is only one correct interpretation of the meaning of freedom and that the Germans have got it wrong. But that is a philosophical position that needs a defense, and it can't be defended merely by climbing onto great heights of high-minded generality. Any such highly generalized approach is bound to be question-begging, ahistorical, and chauvinistic.

Two final comments, the first for Mr. van den Haag. The statement that Singer's audiences are mainly academic is a bit misleading. At the Monash Center for Human Bio-Ethics the audiences are not infrequently made up of doctors, nurses, and other health-care workers. Most of these people have no philosophical skills to start with. Most of them have no further contact with philosophy after completing the courses at the Center. They are in effect being trained to accept the ideas to be found in Singer's books. It is not really surprising that some Australian philosophers privately refer to the Center as "The Death Factory."

The other comment is for Mr. Gross: I don't much care for the epithet "respected." It sounds too much like the word "respectable." Philosophers ought not to be respectable. They ought to be open-minded gadflies.

The Schwartz-Laughlin letters

To the Editors:

I was glad to see that your reviewer Bruce Bawer found my book *Delmore Schwartz and James Laughlin: Selected Letters* "expertly edited and annotated" (Books, May 1993). I must however point out an inaccuracy which badly misrepresents the book. Bawer concludes that "this volume consists mostly of material by Schwartz that has already appeared in *Letters of Delmore Schwartz*."

Untrue. In my "Notes on the Text" to the new book I state: "Only a few of the 204 letters in the present text have already been published. My edition of *Letters of Delmore Schwartz* (Ontario Review Press, 1984) contains complete versions of sixteen letters to Laughlin, of which a number but not all are reprinted here." If the new book has fewer than sixteen previously published letters, and contains a total of 151 letters from Schwartz to Laughlin, most of the book cannot possibly have "already appeared" in the earlier volume.

Robert Phillips
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Houston, Texas

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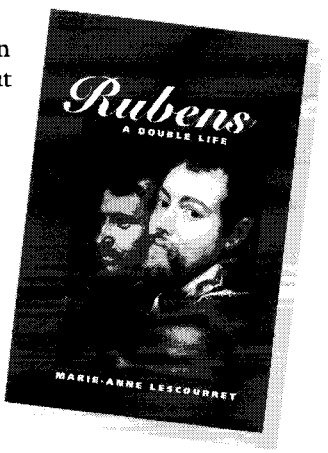

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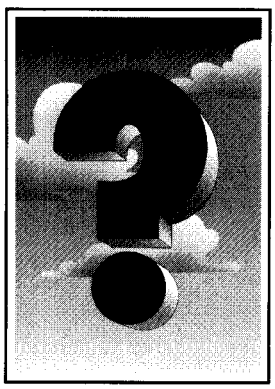

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